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IN RE THAT AGGRESSIVE SLAVOCRACY

BY

CHAUNCEY SAMUEL BOUCHER, Ph. D.
PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
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IN RE THAT AGGRESSIVE SLAVOCRACY¹

From most of the historical works covering the ante-bellum period one gains the impression that the dominant factor, controlling the course of events, is found in a powerful, united, well-organized, aggressive slavocracy. Some of the more prominent details of the picture are as follows: Shortly after the war of 1812 this aggressive slave power began to sense its strength and future possibilities. As its designs were unfolded and became generally known, the first successful effort to check its growing power came in 1820 with the Missouri compromise. This proved but a temporary setback, however, for the south then looked toward Texas, with the result that in 1836 Texas was asking for admission as a slave state. In the meantime, the south had forced upon the union an acceptance of its tariff views in 1833. Though the antislavery forces now began to mobilize for a general crusade against the aggressions of the slaveholders and did succeed in delaying Texan annexation for a decade, that aggressive southern group ultimately had its way and added another slave state. Not content with the annexation of this Texan domain, from which five slave states might ultimately be made, the south pushed the country into the war with Mexico to gain still more territory for the expansion of its institution and more votes in congress to insure its domination. At the same time this selfish section, willing to promote only its own interests, managed affairs so that our just claim to much of the Oregon territory was forfeited, simply because if it had been pressed the result would have been the addition of more free states. When the Wilmot proviso was offered as a stop to the program of southern aggression, the south succeeded in defeating it and secured the lion's share in the compromise settlement of 1850. The next and most unpardonable work of this aggressive slavocracy was the Kan-

¹ This paper was given in part as the presidential address at the fourteenth annual meeting of the Mississippi valley historical association at Madison, Wisconsin, on April 14, 1921.

sas-Nebraska bill of 1854, with the repeal of the compromise of 1820, which had been planned for a decade. This was soon followed by the Dred Scott decision, designed to make slavery in all the territories absolutely secure. The next step was to be, through another such decision, a forced legalization of slavery in all of the then free states.

Through it all the oligarchy of slaveholders in the south had become drunk with power and their hopes and ambitions knew no bounds. Controlling the situation as the planters did in the south, including the border states, and united on all serious questions of policy where the "peculiar institution" was involved, in spite of the appearance of party division on smaller matters, they would be able to control the policy of the country; for a compact minority, with the advantages of great wealth and leisure to devote to public affairs, could govern in any country. With the successes enumerated above to their credit, and their control of the presidency, which was almost continuous beginning with 1844, and control of the house, the senate, and the supreme court either established or within reach, they developed imperialistic plans to bring Cuba, Mexico, and Central America under their system of control. The resources and opportunities of the section were to be fully developed through a series of southern commercial conventions which would launch successful propaganda for the conservation of cotton soils, the perfecting of the efficiency of labor units, the promotion of manufacturing establishments in the south, the building of a railroad to the Pacific along a southern route, the reopening of the African slave trade to furnish the additional labor needed, and the establishment of steamship lines from southern ports to Europe. Thus the south would control the nation, and through King Cotton it could control the destinies of the rest of the world; and the corner stone of its ideal scheme of civilization was to be slavery. It would have a perfect society in which every man should have a place—the best place for which he was fitted—and should keep it.²

This is the picture, not thus drawn in its entirety in any

² Numerous references could be given to general histories, biographies, and special works to show how generally accepted is this view. The purpose of this paper is not to contradict any one author, however, but to examine the soundness of view of a whole group.

one account, but large sections of it appear in most accounts. It is the purpose of this monograph to examine the picture in detail and to see whether it is true to facts. Was the south united throughout the ante-bellum period in its position on big questions of policy and action? Was it really united on any single big issue? Was it normally aggressive, or was it on the defensive?

Those historians who see in the ante-bellum south only an aggressive slavocracy admit that a primary requisite for that section to have been on the aggressive would seem to have been unity of purpose and action. The well-known fact that there were two thriving political parties in the south in the decade 1840-1850, when the south is supposed to have got well started on its aggressive program, is dismissed with the simple statement that though each party might twit the other on occasion with being disloyal to slavery, in any great crisis they were almost certain to unite. True, this is the logic which is demanded by the acceptance of the doctrine of an aggressive slavocracy. But, is it true to facts?

One does not read very far in newspaper files or correspondence collections of the ante-bellum period in the south before one encounters frequent complaints and laments, registered in all seriousness, that such a situation — unity of purpose and action politically — did not exist. Party divisions were not mere surface affairs; party ties did not hang loosely, and party allegiance was not renounced lightly. Indeed, the true state of affairs seems to have been that party divisions cut deeply through the body politic; party ties were strong, and party allegiance was renounced only under most abnormal and forceful circumstances. Personal political feuds between individuals and groups were as bitter and persistent as in any other section of the union. If he who is obsessed with the idea of a united and aggressive slavocracy reads newspaper and correspondence material, the frequency with which such complaints as the following are repeated should make him pause: the south is not united; apparently it cannot be united — certainly not for defense in advance of an anticipated attack, but perhaps it may be united after an "overt act" has been committed; (such an "overt act," however, capable of uniting the south, did not come prior to 1860;) there are few southern statesmen with big views and

disinterested motives; there are too many selfish, spoils-seeking politicians, interested only in serving personal ends; party ties are stronger than sectional ties; spoilsmen are ever ready to knife each other or honest men interested in principles; the majority of the party rank and file are strongly inclined to temporize with principles and to postpone ultimately inevitable issues; since the abolitionists are so insistent and such persistent fighters, and since the south is not united and not aggressive, the politicians see that they have more to gain and less to lose by giving in to the former at the expense of the latter; the northern enemies of the south have many shrewd statesmen enlisted in their ranks who will not commit the blunder of taking such an advanced position as will result in uniting the south, but who by slow and careful advances are succeeding in deluding the south and keeping it distracted until the time will be ripe for the final step of complete abolition, with assurance of success; the safety of the south depends less upon the patriotism (to the south) of its politicians, than upon the boldness of its opponents.

In the following pages it will be demonstrated frequently that southern unity did not exist. Even in congress the south did not present a united front which might have enabled it to make demands with assurance of having them met; however, there was a nearer approach to unity of purpose and action among southern men in congress than among their constituents at home, the section over. It was difficult enough to get the people of a single state to agree upon and take a definite stand, as is witnessed by the history of South Carolina from 1828 to 1861; and as for getting several states to agree even upon an interpretation of the situation at any given time, to say nothing of concerted action, it seemed to be utterly hopeless, for it seemed almost hopeless in the case of two states, neighbors with apparently identical interests, South Carolina and Georgia.

On several occasions in the period from 1840 to 1860 men wrote in private correspondence that the only real hope they had of ever getting the south to take a united and effective stand in defense of its rights lay in South Carolina, which seemed to be the only state where there was enough of unity, steadfastness to principle, and boldness to cause the state to take a

stand; this would likely result in an attempt to coerce South Carolina which could not be concealed from the people of the other southern states, who would then, and then only, be brought to real, effective, united action for defense of the section. On the other hand, it was just as frequently predicted that any movement started by the "palmetto state" was sure to fail for want of support from the other southern states, so great was their distrust, jealousy, and hatred of the leadership of that state.

The ante-bellum period was characterized, in South Carolina and in the south generally, by waves of excitement. An examination of any one of these will reveal the same general story: much talk about necessity of action — of united action; but it never materializes. Always there are bitter party feuds, distrust of leaders, complaint of lack of proper leadership, et cetera, *ad infinitum*.

The story of the whig party in the south is a forceful proof of the lack of unity. When the "peculiar institution" was assailed from the north, of course the state-rights whigs came to its defense. As it was early seen that the northern whigs tended to be more actively hostile to slavery than were the northern democrats, the southern whigs were reminded of the fact and taunted with being traitors to their own interests. Quite naturally, perhaps, then, as long as the alliance between the southern and the northern wings of the party was continued, the southern whigs were more moderate in their defense of slavery than were the southern democrats. Throughout the struggle in congress over the gag resolutions the compact front of the south was broken again and again quite perceptibly by whig votes. The same was true of the votes in the house on the election of a speaker and in the senate on the ratification of appointments made by the president, when objection was raised that the man under consideration was an antislavery man. Indeed, through the eighteen-forties many southern whigs denounced the democrats for eternally dragging forth the slavery question to cover up the real issue, whatever it might be, and to stir up agitation. When the national whig party became irreparably split over the slavery question, it did not mean that from that time on there was a united south with a single purpose and a

single policy. Though southern whigs agreed to disagree with their northern party brethren they could not agree among themselves nor with the southern democrats on a position to be held against the common foe; and, though the national democratic party continued its existence down to 1860, there was marked disagreement in the southern ranks of that party as to policy.

Throughout the ante-bellum period there were men in the north who were not ready to support all the aggressive measures directed against the south; these men were styled "northern men with southern principles," and were referred to more contemptuously as "doughfaces." There seem to have been quite as many men in the south who were inclined to be conservative, less radical in demands, and willing to make concessions; these men were called "southern traitors" in some quarters. But the striking difference between the sections in this respect was that, while in the north there was pretty general agreement in classifying men as "doughfaces," in the south there was a lack of agreement as to who were the "traitors;" a man might be to one group in the south a wise and honest statesman, while at the same time to another group he might be a political charlatan and a traitor. Many men who were called traitors by various compatriots in the south might be named. There was considerable interest in, and comment upon, the Calhoun-Benton feud. Some referred to Benton as "Tommy the traitor" and developed their meaning at length, but admitted that if Benton could "force on" his opponents "the livery of Calhoun and disunion" he could "make them odious enough to scare children with." When, in all seriousness, one group of correspondents referred to certain political leaders as traitors to the south and to other leaders as wise and honest statesmen; when another group of correspondents referred to the same leaders with terms of classification just reversed; and when still others classed both groups of leaders as traitors, the historian must conclude that the section was thoroughly disorganized and that it possessed no real unity of purpose or action.

It was the irony of fate that the southern statesman who saw, perhaps more clearly than any other, the necessity of southern unity for defense through the maintenance of the "true Republican principles," and who strove earnestly to

promote such unity of action in support of basic principles, was the very one who perhaps caused more division and bitterness of strife within the section than any other man. No man ever had followers more devoted and enemies more bitter among the "people at home" than John C. Calhoun.

Instead of a united, aggressive slavocracy, one finds evidence at almost every turn that the true picture is quite the reverse, and that keen students of public affairs realized full well that cross-purposes and disorganization prevailed. Again and again, throughout the period from 1835 to 1860, complaint was registered that, vainly putting its trust in national parties, without unanimity of opinion either as to the dangers that menaced or the remedies to be applied, with no distinct issue, no certain aim, no wise plan of statesmanship, no well-defined ideas of what it might have to fear, to hope, or to do, the south was dragged along, ingloriously enough, by the fatal delusions of national partyism, a source of profit to its southern betrayers and a spoil and a mockery to its northern enemies. Though the opinion was frequently offered that if united the south would be invincible, at least in the protection of its rights, it was almost as frequently admitted that it seemed impossible to get the section to unite even for self-defense, let alone for a positive or an aggressive program, within the union. Hence it was that toward the end of the period some sincere believers in the preservation of the "Constitutional Union" as the best policy for both sections began to hope for secession by a single state as the only development which could bring about southern unity; and many of these men admitted at the same time that they feared that such unity would last but a short time beyond the formation of a southern confederacy, and that disorganization and disintegration would soon follow.

When the historian finds that some southerners boasted of how they might control the nation if they could but secure unity among southern statesmen and politicians, and that individuals or groups urged this item or that one for a southern program and boasted of the wonders it would work, is the historian to interpret them literally? In most of such instances were they not in the mood of a small boy going down a dark alley, whistling as loud as he can to keep up his courage? Just as the boy's

whistling is so forced and strained that he hits many false notes, so the boasting of southerners gives one the impression that it was forced, unnatural, not sincere, and hence false notes were struck.

When the south struggled for power in national councils, was it for political strength to be used aggressively? Did the south have a positive program to be put through in its own interest to the exclusion of, or the positive injury of, the other sections? Did not the south want political strength mainly or simply to block and stop the aggressions of its opponents? Did it ask anything more than to be let alone and not to be made to bear the burden of legislation injurious to itself alone?³

The charge of aggression was made against the south for the first time seriously and rather generally in the middle eighteenth-thirties, when projects for Texan independence from Mexico and annexation to the United States were launched; this time was also marked by the launching of the aggressive anti-slavery crusade in the north. During the next decade the charge was made with ever-increasing frequency and reached the height of its strength and popularity at the time of the

³ To give all the source citations in correspondence collections and newspaper files upon which these observations are based would require unwarranted space. Reference can be made simply in a general way to the Hammond papers, the Calhoun papers, *The correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb*, edited by Ulrich B. Phillips (American historical association, *Annual report*, 1911, volume 2—Washington, 1913), *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, edited by J. Franklin Jameson (American historical association, *Annual report*, 1899, volume 2—Washington, 1900), and files of southern newspapers of the ante-bellum period, now in the possession of the University of Texas, the Alabama state department of archives and history, the Charleston library society, South Carolina university, and the library of congress. Many secondary works, such as Arthur C. Cole, *The whig party in the south (Prize essays of the American historical association, 1912—Washington, 1913)*, are valuable. Letters especially valuable for a picture of the south at different times are the following: Calhoun from J. W. A. Pettit, June 18, 1847, from Wilson Lumpkin, August 27, 1847, August 25, 1848, from H. W. Connor, October 6, 1847, from A. Bowie, January 19, 1848, and from Louis T. Wigfall, January 4, 1849, in the Calhoun papers; Stephens to James Thomas, February 13, 1850, to J. Henly Smith, January 22, September 15, 16, 1860, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 184, 457, 496, 497. Another volume of Calhoun correspondence is now being edited by R. P. Brooks and C. S. Boucher, for publication by the Manuscripts commission of the American historical association, as one volume of the *Reports*; it will contain about four hundred letters written to Calhoun from all parts of the country in the eighteen-forties. Hereafter, in this monograph, this collection of correspondence, as yet unpublished, will be referred to as the "Calhoun papers."

Mexican war. It held sway in the north until 1861, has persisted from that day to this, and is repeated in books published within the past year, 1920.

The settlement of Texas by emigrants from the south was as natural a development as any phase of the westward movement. At a time when migration westward—the pushing into new lands and the development of them—was one of the most important and generally characteristic movements in all parts of the United States, why was it not to be expected that the south would share in this common impulse? and, when it developed that the south did share the impulse and acted on it, why was this worthy of being labeled a criminal conspiracy?

In view of the facts that the culture of cotton by the plantation system required larger units of land and exhausted the land relatively more rapidly than the northern type of agriculture with varied crops and smaller units, it was natural that the southern frontier should lead, as it did into Missouri and Texas. Furthermore, at a time when the westward migration in the United States was steadily increasing and when the western prairies were designated as the Indian country, or were closed to the south by the compromise of 1820, it would seem natural that the stream of advance should have been diverted to the southwest. Those who have made a critical study of the colonization of Texas, however, have found that the settlement of that state, in the early days before its independence, was not promoted by slavery, to any appreciable extent. A few slaveholders were attracted by the opportunity to secure cheap lands, but the early emigration to Texas was chiefly of “land-hungry” men of small means, small farmers, back-country men of the Jackson-democrat type, and very few were owners of more than a very few slaves, while the majority were not slaveholders at all. Slaves were brought into Texas in greater numbers after independence and after annexation, but the majority of immigrants were still nonslaveholders, and the slaves constituted only twenty-seven per cent of the total population of Texas in 1850 and only thirty per cent in 1860. There seems to be little, if any, evidence to show that the settlement of Texas was due even in small part to the political ambitions of the south to increase the slaveholders’ strength in congress. When Texas was ripe for annexation, the accomplishment of

this desideratum was delayed a decade by the slavery complication. If there had not been a single slave within the limits of the United States, the independence of Texas and its subsequent incorporation into the union would likely have come about, as a result of the natural course of the westward movement, but with this possible difference: annexation might have come ten years earlier than it did. Slavery, instead of stimulating the annexation, actually delayed it.⁴

During the period of delay, caused by the opponents of slavery, the south learned that these opponents were planning attacks which would be impeded by an accretion of strength to those about to be assailed; and, by the same token, which prompted a determination on the part of antislavery men to prevent this accretion of strength, southerners saw that it was their cue to be interested in it. Then it was, in the period when Texas was kept waiting for admission, that great numbers in the south for the first time demanded annexation as necessary for their safety in the national councils. True, a few, such as Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, as early as 1835 urged annexation because it might give the south six additional slaveholding, antitariff states, securing to the south a checking power in the senate against hostile legislation. But it was not until later, after Texas had been held off for some time, that great numbers in the south came to demand annexation for this reason; not until the aggressions of the abolitionists forced them to this as a defensive position. And even this same Robert J. Walker was a consistent expansionist, whether slavery was involved or not, even more than he was a guardian of the institution.⁵

Further, on the eve of the annexation of Texas the south was interested in adding that state to the union because of the inter-

⁴ George P. Garrison, *Westward extension, 1841-1850* (*The American nation: a history*, volume 17—New York, 1906), 90; James E. Winston, "Texas annexation sentiment in Mississippi, 1835-1844," in the *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 23:1-19; Calhoun from Thomas Scott, April 4, 1844, from William Hale, May 18, 1844, from Wilson Shannon, May 25, 1844, from Sam R. Thruston, December 2, 1844, from William C. Anderson and others, November 6, 1845, Calhoun papers. The writer is indebted for valuable suggestions and information on the history of Texas to his colleagues, Mr. E. C. Barker, who has done considerable work on the Anglo-American colonization of Texas, and Mr. C. W. Ramsdell.

⁵ Winston, "Texas annexation sentiment in Mississippi," in the *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 23:2; R. M. T. Hunter to Calhoun, October 10, 1843, Calhoun papers.

national dangers arising from English designs in Texas—dangers, both political and economic, to the whole union—quite as much as it was interested in this possible increase in political strength for the defense of slavery in the union, or in the avoidance of the danger of having as a neighbor a state to be abolitionized under English influence. Many of the letters in southern correspondence of 1844 and 1845 show that the writers, southerners, were thinking mainly about the international aspect of the Texas annexation question; thinking of the peace and prosperity of the nation as a whole; fearing a Texan alliance with Great Britain that would lead to diplomatic troubles, and most likely to war; fearing the bad commercial effects on the nation as a whole of independent Texas allied commercially with other nations and waging commercial warfare upon the United States. The great majority of these letters contain no mention of more votes in congress for slavery; some of them show anxiety over the effect of emancipation in Texas upon the slave states, and a desire to block this further aggressive move by Great Britain against a domestic institution in the United States. Indeed, some southerners thought the annexation of Texas of so grave importance to the United States as a whole, for international and commercial reasons, that they would have been much more outspoken for it, had it not been for the fact that the slavery embarrassment caused them to approach the subject with the greatest caution.⁶

But, once the slavery issue had been clearly drawn in connection with Texas, many southerners realized that to permit it to be rejected because it would enter as a slave state would be for the south to surrender all rights. After Texas had been kept out for some eight years, the south seems to have become fully awakened to the importance of Texas in connection with

⁶ Calhoun from R. M. T. Hunter, October 10, 1843, from F. W. Pickens, November 24, 1843, from Richard Hawes, March 21, 1844, from Isaac Van Zant and J. Pinckney Henderson, April 22, 1844, from James Gadsden, May 3, 1844, from R. F. Simpson, May 24, 1844, from William M. Gwin, August 20, 1844, from Duff Green, December 13, 20, 1844, from Eustis Prescott, January 4, 1845, from J. S. Mayfield, February 19, 1845, from J. Hamilton, February 28, 1845, from A. J. Donelson, March 24, 1845, Calhoun papers; George D. Phillips to Cobb, February 21, 25, 1845, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 65, 66; Calhoun to Charles J. Ingersoll, July 2, 1844, Calhoun from Ambrose D. Mann, October 31, 1844, from William R. King, January 29, 1845, from John Tyler, June 5, 1848, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 599, 982, 1022, 1172.

slavery. Then, with the views of Great Britain and the northern states not only disclosed but openly avowed, the annexation of Texas became to some southerners the most vital issue since the American revolution. "On it," wrote one of these, "hinges the very existence of our Southern Institutions, and if we of the south now prove recreant, we . . . must [be] content to be Hewers of wood and Drawers of water for our Northern Brethren."

South Carolina, the state usually accredited with being in the van when an aggressive program to serve southern interests was on foot, did not become generally interested in Texas until 1843; and even then that state and its great statesman, Calhoun, were quite as much interested in the tariff and in general governmental reform as in Texas. Indeed, they became insistent upon the annexation only when they saw that defeat of that project would be regarded as a great victory for the abolitionists and would serve to encourage them in further aggressions. Another phase which interested South Carolinians quite as much as any other was the danger that Texas would fall into the hands of a commercial rival whose hold would involve international trouble in view of the Monroe doctrine.⁸

One of the best proofs that the south was not united in a deep-laid slavery-extension plot to add another slave state is found in a suggestion, made late in 1843, that the Texas ques-

⁷ Calhoun from E. J. Black, March 4, 1844, from Richard Hawes, March 21, 1844, from J. H. Howard, May 2, 1844, from James Gadsden, May 3, 1844, from L. A. Hoe, May 11, 1844, from J. H. Hammond, June 7, 1844, from R. F. Simpson, August 4, 1844, from W. M. Corry, February 14, 1845, Calhoun papers; Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, March 23, 1844, Calhoun to George W. Houk, October 14, 1844, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 624, 942; Cobb from Thomas Ritchie, May 6, 1844, from J. W. Burney, January 31, 1845, from Junius Hillyer, February 15, 1845, Toombs to Stephens, February 16, 1845, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 56, 62, 63.

⁸ Chauncey S. Boucher, "The annexation of Texas and the Bluffton movement in South Carolina," in the *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, 6:3-33. F. W. Pickens wrote to Calhoun on November 24, 1843: "I fully agree as to the importance of the Texas question in all its bearings. I think we are bound to take the highest and most decided grounds. I think the possession of Texas as a British colony would be the just cause of war, and if the non-slaveholding states oppose its admission upon the ground of its strengthening the slaveholding interests, etc., we will be bound in self respect and self-preservation to join Texas with or without the Union. It is a grave and a momentous question in all its bearings, and I am ready to pledge all that I am and all that I hope to be on its issues." Calhoun papers.

tion might be used to unite the south politically in an endeavor to defeat both Clay and Van Buren and prevent the betrayal expected in tariff legislation. Again and again letters written in the early part of 1844 show that the south was not united on any stand and that the men who saw the international and sectional dangers involved in the defeat of annexation were trying to devise some means to arouse southerners to present a united front for Texas. In South Carolina embarrassment was caused by the Bluffton movement led by Robert B. Rhett for state action—nullification or secession—against the tariff, for this movement created distraction just when unity was needed.⁹

Letters written to Calhoun during 1842, 1843, and 1844 show that the writers were interested primarily in keeping the democratic party, and thus the administration of the government, true to certain principles—basic principles of administration, illustrated specifically in the tariff, currency, banking, public lands, et cetera, and only secondarily in slavery. There are no signs of a “plot” of an “aggressive slavocracy.” Indeed, there are dozens of letters with no mention of slavery. Accordingly, Texas was not the biggest issue in the election of 1844, from the standpoint of many a southerner. It was the basic change of principles for national administration, the triumph of true democracy—“the true Republican principles,” as they were called—that was welcomed so much with the victory of Polk.¹⁰

⁹ Virgil Maxey wrote on December 14, 1843: “Some of your friends at Washington I fear would hesitate at taking issue with Mr. V. B. and Mr. Clay on what they consider your extreme notions on the subject of Tariff alone, and for that reason to prevent the possibility of a schism or any faltering in the ranks it seemed to me expedient to strengthen your position and your hold on them by the addition of the Texas question. This course would I think strengthen you throughout the South, where I should hope there would be no division on the Texas question, tho’ on the subject of a protective tariff, there are still some, who feel a toleration for discrimination, not only for revenue, but for the purpose of incidental protection or *encouragement* of manufactures.” Calhoun papers. See also Boucher, “The annexation of Texas and the Bluffton movement in South Carolina,” in the *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, 6:9; Calhoun from R. M. T. Hunter, October 10, 1843, from J. H. Howard, May 2, 1844, from James Gadsden, May 3, 1844, from Eustis Prescott, May 11, 1844, from J. H. Campbell, May 14, 1844, from F. H. Elmore, July 30, 1844, from H. Hailey, July 30, 1844, from F. W. Pickens, August 10, 1844, in the Calhoun papers; Virgil Maxey to Calhoun, December 3, 1843, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 896.

¹⁰ Calhoun from J. H. Hammond, February 3, 1844, from R. B. Rhett, February 21, 1844, from George McDuffie, March 10, 1844, from F. W. Pickens, August 10,

After Calhoun became secretary of state southerners urged him to take "the highest grounds" on the Oregon question quite as often as they urged a similar course regarding Texas. Many of these correspondents were able to view the two questions more disinterestedly, from the standpoint of national welfare, than many of their brethren in the north. They did not worry about the future admission of new free states formed from the Oregon territory, and indeed were not sure that if Texas were divided the result would not be three free states and two slave states formed from its territory.¹¹ Many men agreed with Howell Cobb of Georgia, who was an ardent "fifty-four-forty" man and was quite disgusted that we surrendered so much of the Oregon territory and yet showed such haste to bait Mexico.¹² After Polk, in his message of December 2, 1845, announced that "the proposition of compromise which had been made [by the United States] and rejected [by England] was by my direction subsequently withdrawn and our title to the whole Oregon territory asserted, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments,"¹³ and Calhoun urged caution and moderation to avoid a war with England, but at the same time was ready to insist on a fair and just settlement, southerners generally approved this stand. In Calhoun's correspondence, however, there is no evidence that the south wanted to limit the Oregon territory in order to limit the area of the free states. The only references to the slavery question are

1844, from Francis Wharton, August 21, 1844, from J. Hamilton, September 12, October 4, 1844, from W. R. King, November 29, 1844, from J. S. Barbour, December 18, 1844, from Duff Green, March 26, 1845, Calhoun papers.

¹¹ Calhoun from F. H. Elmore, March 11, 1844, from F. W. Pickens, April 22, 1844, September 29, 1845, from G. W. Houk, October 1, 1844, from Thomas G. Clemson, November 11, 1845, from H. W. Connor, January 6, 1846, from Elwood Fisher, January 10, 1846, from J. H. Howard, January 16, 1846, Calhoun papers; George D. Phillips to Cobb, December 30, 1845, Stephens to George W. Crawford, February 3, 1846, Cobb to his wife, May 10, 1846, and several letters to and from Cobb in the middle of 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 69, 71, 76.

¹² Charles J. McDonald, former governor of Georgia, wrote to Cobb on July 7, 1846, from Macon, Georgia: "The whole course of Congress in regard to the Oregon question has shown the ignoble spirit that would concede to power what it would maintain against a nation less able to defend its usurpations." *Ibid.*, 84. See also John H. Lumpkin to Cobb, November 13, 1846, *ibid.*, 86.

¹³ James D. Richardson, *A compilation of the messages and papers of the presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, 1897), 4:395.

occasional allusions to the northern charge that the south, having secured Texas, wanted to let Oregon go by default or greatly to reduce that territory, so as to lessen the power of the free states. And here the remarkable thing is the slight attention paid even to this charge, which was false. So far from being on the aggressive, the south was not yet thoroughly awake to the necessity of defensive measures.¹⁴

As annexation was delayed, through the later eighteen-thirties, it became evident that the south was not and could not be united as a champion of annexation. In the early eighteen-forties southern whigs were inclined to oppose the annexation project, lest it reflect credit upon Tyler and, later, upon Calhoun, who became secretary of state. Clay, while on his triumphal progress through the south on the eve of the campaign of 1844, concluded that the southern interest in and insistence upon annexation was much less than represented, and he acted accordingly in his "Raleigh letter," which indeed was approved by several southern leaders. The points raised by Clay regarding a compromising of our national character, the danger of a war with Mexico, and the danger to the integrity of the union had weight with many southerners, and especially with southern whig members of congress.¹⁵ While some of these southern opponents of annexation, both democrats and whigs, in the early days of the campaign of 1844 clearly stated that their objection was merely against too hasty action and that they hoped for annexation when temporary difficulties had passed, others followed the reasoning of Waddy Thompson and opposed annexation on the fundamental grounds that, by causing emigration from the old slave states, it would weaken and would ultimately endanger the slave interests in the old states. Some whigs objected that the annexation question was endangering party success and others were distinct champions of the union and opposed annexation because it might lead to a dissolution of the union.¹⁶

¹⁴ Many letters written in the first half of 1846, in the Calhoun papers. Albon Chase to Cobb, May 20, 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 77.

¹⁵ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 110, 111.

¹⁶ George McDuffie wrote to Calhoun from Washington on January 3, 1843: "There is an impression here that the administration are negotiating for the annexation of Texas, but nothing certain or definite has transpired. My own opinion is that nothing, but a very high state of necessity will justify the measure

The position of Clay and the whig party proved unsatisfactory to many voters who had supported the party in 1840, however, and the whig vote in the south was materially lessened, due both to the Texas question and to the lack of something corresponding to the "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" appeal to the districts outside the black belt. It was not the south alone, however, nor the Texas issue alone, which elected Polk in 1844. The vote of the north and the Oregon question were equally responsible. The people the country over, north as well as south, were wild for expansion, "manifest destiny," and comparatively little attention was given to problems involved in slavery extension.¹⁷ After the popular verdict was known and the joint resolution method of annexation was resorted to, enough southern whigs gave in to cause the success of the measure, but the general body of the southern whig congressmen opposed on grounds of constitutionality or because they believed it would prove disastrous to the slaveholding interests in some if not in all of the old states.¹⁸

either on the score of justice or policy. It would be *ipso facto* making war on Mexico, if done without her concurrence, and there would be hazard that Great Britain would take part with Mexico." Calhoun papers. See also Boucher, "The annexation of Texas and the Bluffton movement in South Carolina," in the *MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW*, 6:3-33, and R. F. Simpson to Calhoun, August 24, 1844, in the Calhoun papers.

¹⁷Cole, *The whig party in the south*. Calhoun from Thomas Scott, April 4, 1844, from William Hale, May 18, 1844, from Wilson Shannon, May 25, 1844, Calhoun papers.

¹⁸Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 118. Toombs wrote to Stephens on February 16, 1845: "I see nothing but evil to our party and the country that can come out of this question in the future. . . . I concur with you in but one of [your re]asons for desiring annexation and that is that [it will] give power to the slave states. I firmly believe [that in] every other respect it will be an unmixed evil to us [?] and not without natural disadvantages as well as [advanta]ges." Toombs wrote to George W. Crawford on February 6, 1846, concerning the Oregon question, that he thought it was raised by the democrats simply for political purposes, and that Polk was playing it for such. Toombs said that he thought that Polk had no idea of making war on anybody other than the whigs, and that he hoped to get the whigs in a compromised position on the question before the country. "There is another view of this question, purely sectional, which our people don't seem to understand. Some of our Southern papers seem to think that we are very foolish to risk a war to secure anti-slave power." He predicted an early compromise on the forty-ninth parallel, and "therefore a loss of half the country." He did not "care a fig" about any part of the Oregon territory and would gladly give all of it to anybody else but the British. "The country is too large now, and I don't want a foot of Oregon or an acre of any other country,

Even if the south is cleared of the charge of promoting a conspiracy to add Texas to the union with the idea of making some half dozen slave states out of it for the sake of gaining strength in the senate, there still remains the charge that the slavocracy was responsible for bringing on the Mexican war with a view to adding enough more territory to make several additional slave states.

'T wouldn't suit them Southun fellers,
 They're a drefle graspin' set,
 We must ollers blow the bellers
 Wen they want their irons het;
 May be it's all right ez preachin',
 But *my* narves it kind o' grates,
 Wen I see the overreachin'
 O' them nigger-drivin' States.

They may talk o' Freedom's airy
 Tell they're pupple in the face,—
 It's a grand gret cemetary
 Fer the barthrights of our race;
 They jest want this Californy
 So's to lug new slave-states in
 To abuse ye, an' to scorn ye,
 An' to plunder ye like sin.

Aint it eute to see a Yankee
 Take sech everlastin' pains,
 All to git the Devil's thankee
 Helpin' on 'em weld their chains?
 Wy, it's jest ez clear ez figgers,
 Clear ez one an' one make two,
 Chaps thet make black slaves o' niggers
 Want to make wite slaves o' you.

Thus it was that James Russell Lowell, through his fictitious spokesman, Hosea Biglow, represented the sentiments of thousands in the north during the summer of 1846. From this time until 1861 the charge of aggression was hurled with ever-increasing force especially without 'niggers.' These are some of my reasons for my course which don't appear in print." Such expressions as these are the exception even in private correspondence of the period. *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 63, 72.

ing vigor against the south by the abolitionists, and the writer believes that the persistence of the charge from the end of the war to the present in historical works is due to the fact that most of these works have been based on sources which, in the final analysis, are really of abolitionist origin. The writer believes that the south, instead of being the aggressor, was on the defensive throughout almost the entire ante-bellum period; and that so far from having the unity which was a primary necessity for an offensive campaign, the south could not often, nor for long, agree upon even a defensive program, down to the very eve of the civil war. Individuals at times took a stand which may perhaps best be termed "aggressively defensive." The well-known individualism of the southerner, however, militated against united action to the extent that there was no organized, unified aggression.

Although southerners were accused of being treacherously overanxious to avoid war with England, if necessary to gain territory in the northwest which would add nonslaveholding territory to the union, at the same time that they were anxious for war with Mexico to add slaveholding territory to the southwest, it can readily be shown that many of them really and consistently wanted to avoid war with both. Some southerners, indeed, while favoring a firm stand against England on the Oregon question, recommended patience with Mexico. The writer knows of no southerner who openly or secretly advocated war with Mexico, before war had actually begun, for the sake of adding more slave states. President Polk, who has been accused of having been a sectional president, interested primarily in serving southern interests, seems to have been more of a national expansionist *per se* than the leader in a proslavery plot. And the writer has found little if any positive evidence that, even after the war was begun, southerners supported it in the early period for the sake of conquest of future slave states. Their interest in this phase of the war was aroused only when their attention was forced to it by the Wilmot proviso. Such stand as they then took was again a defensive one.¹⁹

¹⁹ Calhoun from F. W. Pickens, April 22, 1844, September 29, 1845, from J. H. Howard, January 16, 1846, from Charles Anthony, February 17, 1846, from Edward J. Black, February 22, 1846, from Alexander Wells, April 9, 1846, from Adam Huntsman, April 10, 1846, from Wilson Lumpkin, May 20, 1846, Calhoun papers; Duff Green to Calhoun, February 22, 1846, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 1073;

From 1842 to 1846, judging from newspapers and correspondence, southerners were thinking more about the tariff than about the territorial phase of the slavery question. They were anxious to avoid war with both Great Britain and Mexico, if it could be done with honor, because war with any power would interfere with their program for tariff and general governmental reform.²⁰

When President Polk, on May 11, 1846, declared in his message to congress that Mexico had "passed the boundary of the United States," had "invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil," and that war existed, notwithstanding "all our efforts to avoid it," existed "by the act of Mexico herself," Abraham Lincoln, in his famous "spot resolutions," and John C. Calhoun, in numerous speeches in the senate, questioned the president's statements; and while Lincoln implied that war had been courted and begun with unbecoming haste, Calhoun said so definitely. He deplored the war, not simply for the manner in which it had been brought on, but for its consequences. He remarked to his friends when the war, which he believed could and should have been avoided, had actually begun, that it was a step from which the country would not be able to recover for a long time, if ever; he added that, for the first time since entering public life, he was unable to see the future.²¹

George McDuffie had been outspokenly opposed to the annexation of Texas both on the score of justice and of policy, for it "would be *ipso facto* making war on Mexico, if done without her concurrence."²² Wilson Lumpkin, former governor of Georgia, John P. King to Cobb, May 7, 1846, Cobb to his wife, May 10, 1846, Cobb from Albon Chase, May 20, 1846, from William H. Hull, May 22, 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 75, 76, 77, 78.

²⁰ Letters from Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, May 20, November 26, 1846, in the Calhoun papers, are typical of scores of letters in this and in other collections.

²¹ *The works of John C. Calhoun*, edited by Richard K. Crallé (New York, 1857), 4:355, 363, 371.

²² George McDuffie to Calhoun, January 3, 1843, Calhoun papers. J. Gregg wrote to Calhoun on February 17, 1847: "You have fully confirmed what I have thought all along and said frequently in my family though I did not care to say much about it out of doors whilst the war was going on, that if Gen'l Taylor had not been ordered from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande we would have had no war and that Mr. Polk had very injudiciously and imprudently dragged us into it as there was no kind of necessity whatever for that ill fated movement.

"The Abolitionists and Northern Members generally objected and predicted that the annexation of Texas would lead to a war with Mexico but we all Mr.

wrote on May 20, 1846, in a tone which indicated anything but rejoicing. "We are *actually* at war with Mexico, whether Constitutionally so or not," he said. "And I now seriously apprehend our difficulties with England will not be speedily adjusted. Indeed I think it possible, that our Mexican war may be the commencement of troubles, that may shake to the center, all the principal governments of the Civilized World. Should the great battle of the World come, we shall of course claim to ourselves the credit of fighting on the side of liberty and Republicanism against Monarchy and Despotism. But I cannot see so clearly where we may find ourselves at the close of the

Polk and all [*sic*] insisted on it that this would not necessarily follow, nor would it had it not been for Mr. Polk's utter lack of judgment and unaccountable indiscretion." Calhoun papers.

P. S. Buckingham wrote on February 21, 1847, that Calhoun's friends in Virginia were grateful to him for "the high and impregnable moral ground which you have taken on the subject of our Mexican difficulties. The people regard the War as Mr. Polk's War." *Ibid.* Cobb wrote to his wife on May 10, 1846: "It is now settled that we are at war with Mexico, and on tomorrow the President is to send in to Congress a war message, and immediately legislation will be had for the prompt and energetic enforcement of our rights against Mexico. . . . I confess I do not feel so warlike myself. I prefer a foeman worthy of my steel. The reflection that we are so eager to avenge ourselves upon this poor, imbecile, self-distracted province, and at the same time sacrifice rights more 'clear and unquestionable' to appease the threatened anger of her Britannic Majesty, is to me humiliating in the extreme. However I will do my duty in both cases honestly and fearlessly, and trust the result to God and to my country." Albon Chase, editor of the *Southern Banner* (Athens, Georgia), wrote to Cobb on May 20, 1846: "I am not disposed to argue any point connected with the Oregon or Texas controversy. I am ranked here as a 54° 40' man, though I do not hesitate to avow that I would yield much for the sake of peace. I would take 49° if England offered it, to avoid a greater evil than the failure to obtain possession of our territory north of that line. And in this, at least, am not inconsistent with myself; for if while at peace, Mexico had entered into a negotiation relative to boundary, I would not insist upon the whole country east of the Rio Grande for the whole length of that river. I would have been gratified at a compromise with her even, for the sake of peace. But it is too late now, and it may ere long be too late in regard to Oregon." William Hope Hull wrote to Cobb from Athens, Georgia, on May 22, 1846, that Clarke county was too much under the influence of whiggery to have much enthusiasm in raising troops for Texas. He cautioned that the democratic party should not get itself into an untenable position on the boundary of Texas, and that the true boundary was not the Rio del Norte for its whole course. "No possible logic can prove that Santa Fé and the other towns on the east side of the river on its upper streams, were ever a portion of Texas. The true line would leave the river somewhere above Mier, and follow the mountains north, leaving a large section between the line and the upper parts of the river." *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 76, 77, 78.

great struggle." He hinted rather strongly at a belief that the president had been duped by the wiles and schemes of a war faction which wanted the war to give it "influence, consequence and popularity." He regretted that the principle had apparently been recognized that the president could at any time force the country into war, without the aid or consent of congress, and that patriotism demanded of congress the supplies to carry on that war, without even allowing it time to deliberate.²³

When news arrived of the skirmishes on the Rio Grande, Calhoun did his best to get the administration to separate the question of war from that which related to the rescuing of General Taylor and his forces. The means necessary for the latter, he said, could, with propriety, be granted at once, but time should be taken for due and deliberate consideration of the former. Had this been done, he later asserted, all legitimate points would soon have been gained from Mexico, without an indefinite and expensive war. Many letters of approval came to Calhoun when he clearly laid the blame for the war upon the lack of judgment and the indiscretion of the administration.²⁴

As the war wore on and men and money were consumed in great quantities, Calhoun raised the question of the objects in view. He had at first to accept the statement of the president that it was not for conquest, but merely to establish our boundary line and to secure indemnity for claims which antedated the war. But, when it looked as though more than enough fighting and conquest had come to pass to satisfy such objects, and there seemed to be real danger that all Mexico might be conquered, either to be held as a province or to be incorporated in the union, Calhoun sounded a warning against such a policy as dangerous from many standpoints. Again and again he urged his "defensive line" policy as best to serve all interests of the United States.²⁵

²³ Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, May 20, 1846, Calhoun papers.

²⁴ Calhoun from J. Gregg, February 17, 1847, from P. S. Buckingham, February 21, 1847, from Wilson Lumpkin, March 11, 1847, from Joseph Pickens, January 6, 1848, *ibid.* See also Calhoun, *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:380; John A. Campbell to Calhoun, November 20, 1847, Calhoun to Andrew P. Calhoun, May 14, 1846, to Thomas G. Clemson, May 28, 1846, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 1139, 690, 691; John P. King to Cobb, May 7, 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 75; the *Charleston Mercury*, May 19, 1846.

²⁵ Calhoun, *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:396, 409, 418, 421; *Charleston Southern Patriot*, June 27, 1846; *Greenville Republican*, February 18, April 16, 1847, Janu-

Calhoun showed that on northern congressmen quite as much as on those from the south rested the blame for the precipitate (to use no stronger word) recognition of the war. He showed also that the responsibility for the determination not to come out of the war without taking a good slice of Mexican territory—a determination voiced by much of the country at large by the end of 1847—lay with northern congressmen of both parties quite as much or more than with southerners. His idea of the propriety of seizing and holding such portion of the Mexican territory as would be ample to cover “all proper claims” was limited to holding it only until the differences between the two countries were settled. And, certainly, the United States having unnecessarily brought on this war, the prewar claims should not be stretched to include indemnity for the cost of the war.²⁶

South Carolina newspapers quite generally took the view that as soon as the enemy was put beyond the Rio del Norte the war should end; accordingly, the lack of moderation displayed in the north, where great armies and a march on the city of Mexico were talked about, worried South Carolinians.²⁷

Southerners complained that the United States government, in beginning the war unnecessarily and continuing it far beyond any point of necessity, had not gained reputation in the eyes of the world for justice, moderation, or wisdom.²⁸ Thomas G. Clemson, a South Carolinian, wrote from Brussels in June, 1846, that he regretted that the Mexican war had given the monarchies of Europe another opportunity to display their lack of sympathy with the United States and its institutions and to point with scorn to the “efficiency” of republican forms of government. “If,” he said, “we could now bring about an honorable peace [after Taylor’s success] and retire from the
ary 21, 1848; *Charleston Mercury*, January 10, 11, 1848; *Columbia Telegraph*, February 4, 1848.

²⁶ Calhoun, *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:381.

²⁷ *Charleston Mercury*, May 18, 25, 1846; *Charleston Courier*, May 15, 1846; *Charleston Evening News*, May 15, 1846; *Charleston Southern Patriot*, June 5, 1846.

²⁸ “Much as I regard military glory,” said Calhoun, “much as I rejoice to witness the display of that indomitable energy and courage which surmounts all difficulties—I would be sorry indeed that our government should lose any portion of that high character for justice, moderation, and discretion, which distinguished it in the early stages of our history.” *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:410.

Mexican territory without the usual excesses that invariably follow successful armies, it would be a great point gained."²⁹

Many a southerner's comments on the war were confined to the national and international aspects of it, with slight reference, if any, to the sectional phase.³⁰ James Chestney, writing from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on November 23, 1846, condemned the Mexican war because it would bankrupt the treasury, endanger the cause of free trade, and create discontent in every section of the union, while it offered no compensating gain.³¹ To many the great dangers of the war, other than the possible conquest of and attempt to hold all Mexico, seemed to be the great increase of the national debt, the extension of the patronage of the executive, the prospect of abandonment of a metallic currency for the paper system, and the abandonment of the practical benefits of free trade because of the necessity for increasing the duties to meet the heavy interest burden of the debt. These occupied the attention of many far more than the prospect of adding new slave states.³²

²⁹ Thomas G. Clemson to Calhoun, June 27, 1846, Calhoun papers. A. J. Donelson, a Tennessean by birth, wrote from Berlin on January 8, 1848, in a similar vein.

³⁰ Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, May 20, 1846, Calhoun papers. Thomas G. Clemson, writing to Calhoun on March 28, 1847, commented on the war from international and national standpoints, and added: "One thing I regret, that is mixing of the slavery question. It appears to have been unavoidable and will perhaps unite the South, and thus enable them to hold on to the advantages they have recently gained." *Ibid.*

³¹ Calhoun papers. Chestney added: "However guilty the government of Mexico may be, the wretched inhabitants of that part of the world are innocent, and the terrible calamities and distress that have been heaped upon the people of Monterey and its vicinity have produced no compensating or corresponding benefit either to the American government, the army, or the American people. I think I speak the language of truth and soberness, as well as of humanity, in regard to the matter, and I am satisfied the best part of the people of the South Western States are disposed to see the affair terminate. . . . I trouble myself very little with politics, but claim a devoted attachment to the great cause of democracy and of human liberty, which are identical with the cause of humanity itself." The belief was frequently expressed in the south that more of evil than of good would come from the war. Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, March 11, 1847, *ibid.*

³² Calhoun, *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:421; Calhoun to Clemson, February 17, 1847, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 718; Calhoun from Wilson Lumpkin, May 20, 1846, from F. W. Byrdsall, August 4, 1846, from R. B. Rhett, May 20, 1847, Calhoun papers; Cobb from John P. King, May 7, 1846, from Charles J. McDonald, July 7, 1846, from James F. Cooper, July 8, 1846, from John H. Lumpkin, November 13, 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 75, 84, 85, 86. F. W.

Robert Toombs of Georgia wrote to Calhoun on April 30, 1847: "I begin to fear that the question [*of slavery*] is fast approaching a crisis. It seems our successes in Mexico have greatly raised the pretensions of Polk and his cabinet, and the weakness and divisions of Mexico will in all probability induce her to accede to terms which we ought not to demand and which will be disgraceful to her and ruinous to us. You are aware of my early and uniform disrelish of the idea of the appropriation of Mexican Territory. I can see nothing but evil to come of it. And now I do not clearly see how it can be well avoided to some extent."³³

True it is that one of the most ardent expansionist propagandists in the Polk administration was the secretary of the treasury, Robert J. Walker of Mississippi. Early in the war he advocated taking all the territory belonging to Mexico north of a line drawn due west from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the Pacific. His chief reason for this policy was not to increase the area of slavery but to sustain the administration by meeting the demand of the people of the country at large for territorial acquisitions. He was not an aggressive proslavery man, as is shown by the fact that for years he advocated gradual emancipation in the United States; he proposed it for Texas as a condition of annexation; he freed his own slaves in 1838; he sustained the treaty for suppressing the African slave trade; he opposed the repeal of the Missouri compromise; and, while governor of the territory of Kansas, he pursued such a course that he was accused of being a traitor to southern interests.³⁴

Byrdsall wrote to Calhoun from New York on August 4, 1846: "One of our Commission merchants or agents of manufacturing establishments of other States, a brother of the well known Whig Simeon Draper, avowed to a gentleman of my acquaintance, that he hoped the Mexican war would involve the country in a public debt of one hundred million dollars. When questioned as to the reason, he replied because it would compel the restoration of a high Tariff. This man is but one of a numerous class whose selfish interests overrule all considerations of the loss of life and destruction of property which must occur before such a debt could be incurred, as well as all other considerations of patriotism or common justice. And yet it is very probable that he (as well as most of the class he belongs to) is a member or elder of a Christian church — a praying and hymn singing man." Calhoun papers.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Elwood Fisher to Calhoun, September 24, 1846, Calhoun papers; Louis B. Pendleton, *Alexander H. Stephens* (*American crisis biographies*—Philadelphia, 1908), 83. T. R. R. Cobb wrote to Howell Cobb from Athens, Georgia, on June 23, [1847]:

David Johnson, governor of South Carolina, wrote to Calhoun on October 26, 1847: "The case contemplated by the Wilmot proviso may never arise. If unhappily it should—for I should deprecate the acquisition of territory from Mexico by conquest—the new states will probably come to our aid." He added that, even admitting that the war had been rightfully begun to protect ourselves against the intrusion of Mexico, we had done enough when we drove the Mexicans out of the territory between the Nueces and the Rio Grande; and to push the war further, for conquest and for permanent occupation, was unwise, unjust, and contrary to his notions of moral right.³⁵ Eustis Prescott wrote to Calhoun from Memphis, on November 8, 1847: "If we must receive territory, it should be open to the citizens of every state with their property, [and] if such territory ever applies to become a member of the Union, the people will decide whether we shall or shall not prohibit slavery within her borders."³⁶ James Gadsden, of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote to Calhoun on January 23, 1848, that "the great object at this time is to arrest the mad designs of conquest. . . . The cry of the administration on that subject has been echoed and the whole Pack of hungry land hounds have opened up on the scent." He still hoped, however, that the whigs and the sober-minded patriots of the democratic party would combine against large acquisitions and would rescue the country from "the catastrophe into which Presidential making and a blind ambition of conquest is hurrying Polk and his advisers."³⁷ John A. Campbell, of Mobile, Alabama, thought that "I am opposed to this Government dismembering Mexico. Let us whip her decently and give her a good government, such as the *people wish*. If they *afterwards* wish to be annexed we can do it. I am for *extending the area of freedom*, but not by *war*. The odious doctrine upon which Britain acts of taking territory for the *expenses* of the war is anti-Democratic. Let the glory of our government be that *not one* citizen lives under its laws that is not there by *choice*." *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 88.

³⁵ Calhoun papers.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ He added, however, that probably the Sierra Madre range was the great natural barrier which should be placed between the Anglo Saxon and the Spanish races. "A river will not answer. The whole of a valley must be settled by the same people, and the valley of the Rio Grande is so susceptible of a large population, that it will constitute a barrier population, which with the difficulties of the Sierra Madre will always make us safe on that frontier." Calhoun papers.

the war had been wrongfully begun; that acquisition of more territory was dangerous to the union from many standpoints not connected with slavery; and that, from the standpoint of the balance of power between the slaveholding and the nonslaveholding states, it would be ruinous to the former, for much of the territory, because it was unfit for use by slaveholders, was bound to make free states.³⁸

Of course, once their country was at war, the people would support it, whether right or wrong. Through 1846 and 1847 many letters were written to Calhoun approving his course in the beginning when he tried to avoid the war, but suggesting delicately that now since the country was actually at war, it would not do for anyone to fail to lend a vigorous support. Southerners who were actually suffering in their fortunes through the "accursed war" were loyal patriots in the country's time of need, even though they had no stomach for the manner of getting into the war or for the prospect of what was to come from it.³⁹

Most of the men quoted or referred to above were democrats. What was the attitude of the southern whigs? As partisans their cue was to oppose the war and to discredit the ambitions of the democratic administration as far as they dared without laying themselves open to the charge of being traitors to their country. The statement has been frequently made, however, that during the ante-bellum period party differences were submerged in the south whenever any crisis appeared which involved sectional interests connected with the "peculiar institution." If this is true then surely here was a time, according to the orthodox version, when southern whigs and democrats alike should have joined forces to secure this accretion of strength for the section. The facts are that not even the democrats were united in the course often attributed to them and

³⁸ John A. Campbell to Calhoun, November 20, 1847, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 1139.

³⁹ Calhoun from Wilson Lumpkin, May 20, December 17, 1846, from H. W. Connor, January 9, 1847, from J. Hamilton, February 7, 1847, Calhoun papers; Cobb from Thomas R. R. Cobb, May 12, 1846, from J. B. Lamar, June 24, 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 76, 82; *Charleston Mercury*, November 10, December 12, 1846; January 12, 16, February 1, 1847; *Greenville Republican*, October 30, June 19, 1846; January 15, 22, 1847; *Charleston Southern Patriot*, January 19, 1847.

the whigs pursued, almost unitedly and quite consistently, a policy of opposition to the war and its resulting acquisition of territory. Many of the whigs had opposed the annexation of Texas because they wished to avoid a dishonorable war and they opposed the course of the president largely on that basis. Even the whig annexationists, such as Stephens of Georgia and Brown of Tennessee, charged that the war was unnecessary and unjustifiable; they condemned it as a war which aimed solely at conquest. "Even the lay members of the party soon began to lose the enthusiasm which a successful war, giving promise of desirable acquisitions of territory, usually arouses. They then demanded that the war be terminated at the earliest possible occasion."⁴⁰

With the introduction into the house of the Wilmot proviso in August of 1846, providing that none of the territory which might be acquired from Mexico should be open to slavery, the south was again put on the defensive. It was soon confronted with assertions made on the floor of the senate and elsewhere that all parties in the nonslaveholding states had come to a fixed and solemn determination upon two propositions: one was that there should be no further admission into the union of any states which permitted, by their constitutions, the existence of slavery; and the other was that slavery should not thereafter exist in any of the territories of the United States. Surely this was warning enough to cause southerners to calculate their relative strength in the union and to resolve that for the sake of preserving the union, as well as for their own protection in it, this design of the antislavery forces must be thwarted. So, instead of being aggressively interested in the Mexican war at its beginning as a means of adding slave states to be used

⁴⁰ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 119; Pendleton, *Alexander H. Stephens*, 76-83, 89-92; John B. Lamar to Cobb, June 24, 1846, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 82; Joseph Pickens wrote to Calhoun from Eutaw, Alabama, on January 6, 1848, that he and his whig friends approved of Calhoun's speech on the war; some of the "old Hunkers" did not. "I have from the first thought that the War might have been avoided if proper prudence had been used by Mr. Polk. I think he lacks the bump of caution if nothing else. I have no hesitation in believing that the President violated the Constitution knowingly and willfully in rushing us into this uncalled for and unnatural War with Mexico, and if his acts are allowed to go unrebuked the Constitution is a perfect dead letter." Calhoun papers.

for an aggressive purpose, the south was forced, during the course of the war, to become interested in a negative and defensive phase of the territorial question; it must prevent the war from being used to serve an aggressive purpose by the enemies of slavery.⁴¹

Joseph W. Lesesne of Mobile wrote that although in the earlier period of the war there had been in the south, as in the north, a strong sentiment for acquisition of territory—because “an insane thirst after land” was “the great American disease”—there was now, in August of 1847, a growing disposition in the south to come out boldly against further acquisition of territory as the only practicable mode of saving the south; for, if a result of the increase of territory should be the enactment of the Wilmot proviso into law, it would mean ruin for the south.⁴² Thus the early enthusiasm of the south for new territory was of the character common to the people of the country as a whole. But when southerners appreciated fully the slavery complication and saw that the prospect of new territory was causing further attacks by the abolitionists, they rued the day when conquest was begun.⁴³

When the Wilmot proviso brought the sectional issue squarely

⁴¹ Calhoun, *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:340; Calhoun from J. Hamilton, February 7, 1847, from Samuel A. Wales, June 17, 1847, from J. W. A. Pettit, June 18, 1847, from F. W. Byrdsall, July 29, 1847, from Daniel E. Huger and others, August 2, 1847, from Joseph W. Lesesne, August 21, 1847, from Elwood Fisher, August 22, 1847, Calhoun papers; Calhoun from Edward Fisher, December 2, 1846, from Wilson Lumpkin, January 6, 1847, from Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, February 14, 1847, Calhoun to Mrs. T. G. Clemson, December 27, 1846, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 716, 1096, 1102, 1104; *Charleston Mercury*, January 14, February 17, June 24, 1847; *Greenville Republican*, January 22, February 12, 1847; *Pendleton Messenger*, January 22, 1847.

⁴² Joseph W. Lesesne to Calhoun, August 24, 1847, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 1130.

⁴³ Joseph W. Lesesne, writing to Calhoun from Mobile on August 21, 1847, commented at great length on the fact that the people of the south were not sufficiently aroused for their own defense against the attacks from the north, of which the Wilmot proviso was but one example. “Should the Whig party concur with us that for the sake of peace on this question we will take no more territory we may escape the dangers that threaten us.” Elwood Fisher, writing to Calhoun from Cincinnati on August 22, 1847, said that political rumors had it that the Silas Wright men of New York insisted on acquisition of territory to augment the strength of the nonslaveholding states, and that both parties in that state were warmly in favor of the Wilmot proviso because they could make of it good political capital with the people. Calhoun papers.

before congress southern whigs joined southern democrats to block the measure, and were successful, thanks to some "northern men with southern principles." The northern whigs having shown fairly clearly their antislavery character, southern whigs tried to solve the problem of party harmony by proclaiming their hostility to the acquisition of territory as a result of the war. Indeed, they came to believe that not simply the preservation of the whig party was at stake, but quite as likely either the "peculiar institution" or the union. Patriotism therefore demanded that this dangerous slavery complication be avoided by blocking annexation of Mexican territory.⁴⁴ Even General Taylor, who, it has been said, was later elected as a southern president, announced, after Mexico had been placed at the mercy of the American armies, that he was decidedly opposed to the acquisition of any territory south of 36° 30', which might endanger the permanence of the union by fomenting a sectional controversy. Furthermore, when reports began to be circulated that conditions of soil and climate would make slavery a physical or an economic impossibility in most of the new region proposed to be annexed, the Wilmot proviso became simply an insulting abstraction which, together with the danger of additional free states in the southwest, could be avoided by blocking annexation.⁴⁵

Thus opposition to the annexation of Mexican territory was accepted by many southern whigs, and many southern democrats as well, as the foundation for the defense of the southern institution and southern rights. The Wilmot proviso was but one aspect of the greater issue. A law passed by the general assembly of Pennsylvania in March, 1847, to impede and prevent the recovery of fugitive slaves, was regarded as a more definite proof that the north was preparing to weaken slavery bit by bit until its utter collapse was assured. Nothing less than this was the ultimate aim. "The Mexican war has been used by our northern and eastern enemies as a means by which they hope to rob us of all constitutional guaranties, subvert institutions most essential to our peace and prosperity, strip us of the insignia of sovereignty, pass a sentence of social degeneration

⁴⁴ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 119; Luther J. Glenn to Cobb, December 1, 1847, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 89.

⁴⁵ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 121-123.

upon us, and effect our complete and total ruin," wrote Percy Walker from Mobile on October 10, 1847.⁴⁶

Even when faced by this crisis, however, the south did not rally upon a defensive position as some of its truer citizens, less interested in party politics, would have had it do. Apathy was breeding future trouble, when decision and firmness were needed to avoid it. Southern unity would work wonders—would solve the problem once for all, some believed—but that essential was lacking. A few men saw clearly the course events were taking in the north: the abolitionists, though few in number, were recruiting their ranks steadily, and by clinging steadfastly to their basic principle they were holding the balance of power between the two main parties and were forcing concessions now from the whigs and now from the democrats. They had, as a result, come to be courted alternately and together by both parties until in many places it had come about that no politician was considered "available" who could not enlist in his behalf this necessary abolitionist vote. The only chance for southerners to maintain for any length of time their rights under the constitution was to be found in united action; yet little headway could be made in this direction.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ He added: "The assault has been kept up for years, but under the false assurances that the great majority of the non-slaveholding people were not parties to it, we have remained idle and inactive, until our enemies have become powerful enough to control the Legislatures of *Ten Sovereign States*, which in the most solemn forms of Law, have declared against us. . . . Our action should be calm, determined, and above all united. We must endeavor to make the Southern States think and feel and act alike, upon this subject. How is this to be done?" Calhoun papers. Calhoun from C. J. Faulkner, July 15, 1847, from Joseph W. Lesesne, September 12, 1847, from H. W. Peronneau, September 25, 1847, from L. M. Keitt, October 1, 1847, from David Johnson, October 26, 1847, from Wilson Lumpkin, December 20, 1847, from Wyndham Robertson, Jr., May 10, 1848, from F. W. Byrdsall, June 25, 1848, from L. H. Morgan, June 30, 1848, from Chesselden Ellis, July 5, 1848, from B. F. Porter, July 17, 1848, from G. B. Butler, July 29, 1848, *ibid.*; Calhoun, *Works* (Crallé, ed.), 4:527; Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, November 18, 1847, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 1135; Isaac E. Holmes to Cobb, August 21, 1847, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 88.

⁴⁷ Calhoun from Wilson Lumpkin, August 27, 1847, from Joseph W. Lesesne, September 12, 1847, from H. W. Connor, October 6, 1847, from Percy Walker, October 10, 1847, from David Johnson, October 26, 1847, from A. Bowie, January 19, 1848, from J. A. Campbell, March 1, 1848, from W. W. Harlee, June 8, 1848, from W. L. Yancey, June 14, 1848, from F. W. Byrdsall, June 25, 1848, from Joseph W. Lesesne, July 5, 1848, from Benjamin F. Porter, July 17, 1848, from Wilson Lumpkin, August 25, 1848, from Z. L. Nabers, November 29, 1848, Calhoun

Once the treaty was concluded and the new territory acquired, the debate began in earnest concerning the powers of congress over the territories and the rights of citizens therein. Even on this question, however, the south could not agree on a defensive program.⁴⁸

papers; Wilson Lumpkin to Calhoun, January 6, 1847, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 1102. A rather unique view of the acquisition of territory from Mexico was presented to Calhoun in January, 1848, by a northern Presbyterian clergyman who asked that his name not be used, but said that the subject matter he presented could be used. He gathered much of his information from abolition sources and the more numerous class of antislavery men who did not belong to abolition organizations. With these classes primarily, he said, the project of an extensive acquisition of Mexican territory was fast gaining ground; in their view, the more extensive the better. Whether slavery were extended over this territory or not, they thought that the annexation of it would ultimately overthrow the institution. Of course, if they could get the territory and keep it free, the forces of slavery would be so surrounded and outnumbered that the end of the institution would soon be compassed. But, even if slavery were not excluded, extensive acquisition of territory was favored for the same ultimate result, though it would be longer in attainment. They reasoned as follows: in proportion as slavery is extended over a greater area, in that proportion is it weakened; the slaves taken to the new territory must come from the old slave states; in those states fewer slaveholders and friends of slavery would be left to bear up against the onsets of their enemies; white laborers would flow in to take the places of the removed slaves; as immigration and the laws of population gave preponderance to the nonslaveholding whites, antislavery presses could be set up right among the slaveholders without fear of molestation; then the battle would be more than half won, and the slaveholders could be defied; the south did not have slaves enough to take permanent possession of extensive territory and hold its own in either the old or the new states; with powers divided and energies distracted it could be cut to pieces in detail. Only temporarily, too, would the south have the preponderance in congress, for while gaining slave states at the south, it would soon lose them at the north; Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina would soon become free. The writer concluded: "From what I can learn I think the signs of the times hereabouts indicate that the Abolitionists and their coadjutors will go for extensive annexation at all hazards. If they can enforce the Proviso they will. But if not they will favor *secretly* if not *openly* what they regard as the *next best*, i. e. a great extension of territory and a *corresponding* expansion of slavery. This will, perhaps, explain the reason why the National Era, the antislavery paper at Washington, goes for the acquisition of territory and yet strenuously urges the Proviso. It betrays their *secret* intentions." He said that extensive acquisition was favored in the north not alone by the antislavery men, for the reasons stated, but by various other classes, each expecting it to serve a peculiar interest; among such classes were the ardent friends of the administration, speculators, capitalists, manufacturers, the military, et cetera. George H. Hatcher to Calhoun, January 5, 1848, Calhoun papers.

⁴⁸ Chauncey S. Boucher, "The secession and co-operation movements in South Carolina," and "South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession," in *Wash.*

The Wilmot proviso, which precipitated one of the most bitterly contested phases of the slavery controversy, was certainly not loftily conceived. It had its origin among democrats who were discontented over the veto of internal improvement bills and the distribution of the patronage. Another factor was impatience in regard to Oregon; the northwestern expansionists did not get as much territory as they coveted, and they claimed that half of Oregon had been given away.⁴⁹

Though the Wilmot proviso was introduced in 1846, and many in the south at once saw that a crisis was at hand which demanded concerted action, and many suggestions were offered as to the best method of procedure, no agreement on policy or plan of action could be reached in the next four years—indeed, such agreement within a single state was rare, and when reached at all was agreement only upon a first step which committed the state to nothing and might lead or be turned in almost any direction. Even in the state which was supposed to be most radical and most free from internal party strife—South Carolina—no agreement could be reached on a platform statement of policy and action which meant anything more than vague hints or threats. The proviso did little to unite the south beyond evoking an agreement in opinion that the placing of such a principle upon the statute books should be defeated if possible. Southerners concurred in a general way in the belief that they might have some rights in the territories, but as to what the extent of those rights was, upon what legal or constitutional basis to rest them, they could not agree; in other words, while they were united in believing that the Wilmot proviso must be resisted, they could not agree upon the necessary positive position or statement with which to parry. Many suggestions of principle or policy were made, but from the presentation of the proviso until the election of 1860 the south was not united upon a thoroughly satisfactory answer to the troublesome and complicated territorial question.

ington university studies, Humanistic series, 5:97-101; 6:83-144; *Charleston Courier*, November 27, December 2, 8, 16, 1847; South Carolina, *House journal*, 1847, pp. 204, 206; Joseph W. Lesesne to Calhoun, August 24, 1847, in *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, 11, 30.

⁴⁹ William E. Dodd, *Expansion and conflict* (*Riverside history of the United States*—Boston and New York, 1915), 170.

The divergence of opinion in the south in regard to future policy or action, after the acquisition of territory had become a certainty, is shown by the division among southern whigs: some advocated disunion if the proviso were passed; some would have accepted the extension of the Missouri compromise line as a fair settlement involving mutual concession; a significant minority were ready to acquiesce, if the proviso should pass both houses and receive the president's signature.⁵⁰

Calhoun answered the Wilmot proviso with a denial of a constitutional power in congress to discriminate between the states by passing a law which would "directly, or by its effects, deprive the citizens of any of the states of this union from emigrating with their property, into any of the territories of the United States." The section could not be thoroughly united on this pronouncement, however, for there were prominent lawyers of both parties in the south who believed that congress did have jurisdiction over, and power to deal with, slavery in the territories.⁵¹

The proposal to extend the Missouri compromise line of 36° 30' to the Pacific coast was not without its embarrassments on points of principle, for it would "yield up forever the constitutional question"; it would be a complete admission of the power of congress over slavery in the territories. Nevertheless, the position of many was clearly stated by a man who said: "Although . . . the north has no *right* to claim our exclusion from one foot of the territory, yet as they do claim it most earnestly and there is no *practical* benefit in our setting up a counter claim to any above 36° 30' I am for settling the controversy by adopting that line." Others, who were interested mainly in the success of the democrats in the coming election, had little patience with constitutional quibbles, asserting that "this idea that constitutional questions may not be compromised is all fallacious." They preferred the "Missouri basis" because that would satisfy the northern democrats best and would bring party harmony, since both the northern democrats and the southern democrats could, without sacrifice, still retain their

⁵⁰ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 124; Calhoun from J. T. Trezevant, June 7, 1849, Calhoun papers.

⁵¹ Calhoun from J. A. Campbell, March 1, 1848, *ibid.*; Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 137.

particular views in regard to the extent of congressional control over the territories.⁵²

Squatter sovereignty, put before the senate in the Dickinson resolutions in December, 1847, and approved by Cass in the Nicholson letter later in the same month, was not satisfactory to all. Objection was frequently registered that it was but a temporary evasion of the points of constitutional principle and not a permanent and satisfactory solution of them; and there was too much certainty of embarrassing complications which would develop from an attempt to apply the theory in actual practice. Many, however, were interested mainly in the election of Cass, were willing to accept his Nicholson letter as satisfactory, resented attempts to force a definition of squatter sovereignty any more clear than Cass had made, and opposed "pressing nice, hair-splitting distinctions on the subject upon our northern democratic friends, whose liberality should be appreciated but not abused." Such men, however, might state very clearly, privately, their reasons for believing that a territorial legislature had no right to prohibit slavery and that such action could be taken only when the constitution for statehood was framed. However, when a southerner contended "that our people should have permission to go" to the territories "with their peculiar property and *risk* the decision of a majority when the territory forms a constitution and demands admission as a State, and that Congress should guarantee this privilege," he was met with the argument presented by his neighbor, "If you yield that settlement to Congress, will it not be surrendering our rights to the Wilmot proviso men?"⁵³

An added complication was introduced by the question whether by Mexican law slavery was legally prohibited in the new territory. How to deal with the Mexican law without abandoning the principle that slavery rested upon state or local law only,

⁵² Calhoun from R. K. Crallé, July 23, 1848, from Laurel Summers, October 21, 1848, Calhoun papers; Cobb from Hopkins Holsey, December 31, 1847, from William Rutherford, Jr., April 16, 1850, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 91, 189; Boucher, "The secession and co-operation movements in South Carolina," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 5:97-101.

⁵³ Calhoun from Louis T. Wigfall, June 10, 1848, from M. Torrance, June 19, 1848, from B. F. Porter, July 17, 1848, Calhoun papers; Cobb from Luther J. Glenn, February 12, 1848, from Henry L. Benning, February 23, 1848, from James C. Dobbin, June 15, 1848, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 95, 97, 107.

and without invoking national legislation for its protection, became a difficult question.⁵⁴

The plan of the so-called Clayton compromise, providing territorial organization for Oregon, New Mexico, and California, and leaving the question of slavery to the operation of the constitution of the United States as interpreted by the supreme court also met with objections. It was recommended in July, 1848, by a senate committee composed of northern and southern men of both parties; it passed the senate with the aid of most of the southern whig members—though they disagreed in expectations as to its operation; but it was shelved in the house, partly because of the efforts of southern whigs who believed that the court could only recognize the continuance of the Mexican law which prohibited slavery there.⁵⁵

At least one Alabama man, a member of the state legislature, thought that the only policy which promised “any good *practical* results” was for each southern state to arm and equip a regiment of volunteer emigrants and send them into the new territory to protect all southerners who might go there, “in the full enjoyment of their property of whatever description, should any effort be made, either by savages, Mexicans, or others to wrest it from them.”⁵⁶

As one reads the opinions of southern men on the territorial question, expressed both publicly and privately from 1846 to 1850, one can only conclude that the situation was well stated by Joseph W. Lesesne of Mobile, when he wrote: “You must be aware how very various and conflicting the opinions of even good and able men at the south are with regard to the question of Slavery in the territories. All profess to be agreed that the Southern people are entitled to occupy them with their slaves as much as the Northern people with their goods and chattels. But how is this right to be enjoyed? how is it to be

⁵⁴ Cobb from Henry L. Benning, February 23, 1848, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 97; Calhoun from J. A. Campbell, March 1, 1848, Calhoun papers.

⁵⁵ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 125; Calhoun from R. K. Crallé, July 23, 1848, from H. V. Johnson, August 25, 1848, Calhoun papers; Stephens to the editor of the *Federal Union* (Milledgeville, Georgia), August 30, 1848, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 117. See also Boucher, “The secession and co-operation movements in South Carolina,” in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 5:70.

⁵⁶ Calhoun from Benjamin Gardner, September 5, 1849, Calhoun papers.

endangered? and if assailed, how is it to be protected? whether the question is not a purely legal or political one? These are points upon which no two persons are entirely agreed, and are full of intrinsic difficulty."⁵⁷

It seemed to many in the south that the abolitionists were but showing their hand when they forced the territorial issue in the face of the fact, which many men seem to have realized, that there was but little territory in the recent acquisitions where slavery could be maintained profitably. The country was by nature dedicated to freedom. The valleys of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin were said to be almost the only districts in the territory acquired from Mexico where slavery could exist, and the question was soon settled there by the inrush of opponents of slavery following the discovery of gold. The territorial question was an abstraction. Many northerners and many southerners knew this. The northerners, or at least the abolitionists, insisted on the technical exclusion of slavery by law simply for the sake of principle, determined to check slavery at every point, hoping ultimately for a checkmate. By the same token the southerners who admitted that it was an abstraction were interested in it even as such, because they saw that if the abolitionists were allowed to gain point after point without opposition, they would ultimately strike at slavery in the states.

The election of 1848 shows again that at this time there was no such thing as a united, aggressive slavocracy. In spite of the truckling of Van Buren and others of the abolitionists, in spite of the evidence of the effective political use to which the abolitionists could be put, and in spite of the signs of the times found in the operations of the free-soil party, the south could not agree. The campaign of 1848 showed, perhaps, that for the first time the south was united on the view that southern interests must be protected. This, however, did not result in unity of action; for, having been brought to this realization of the necessity of a defensive (not aggressive) policy, southerners could agree no further. The southern electoral vote was almost evenly divided between Cass and Taylor, in spite of the fact that Taylor was run as a southerner, who could at least

⁵⁷ Calhoun from Joseph W. Lesesne, July 5, 1848, Calhoun papers.

be relied upon to check the progress of the antislavery movement, if necessary, by the exercise of the veto power. Fillmore, true, was then regarded as a bitter pill for the south to swallow in order to get Taylor—for a president had been known to die and give the vice-president an opportunity for mischief—but serious doubts were registered in many quarters as to whether Taylor could be the regular whig candidate and at the same time a true southerner. Furthermore, his Allison letter left many in doubt as to whether he would veto the Wilmot proviso if passed by a majority of congress. Party ties continued binding. There was as much interest in the spoils of office as ever. How could the south be united on an aggressive campaign to get control of the presidency, when the leaders of the section were so far from agreement on the question supposed to be of greatest interest to the people? The word “supposed” is used deliberately, for many men were interested quite as much in Taylor’s views on the tariff as in any other point involved in the election. While one southerner had only praise for Cass and denunciation for Taylor, in view of the interests of the section, his neighbor used words equally strong, but with the names in reverse order. Even though some regarded a choice between Cass and Taylor as a choice between evils for the south, a third party, devoted to southern interests only, was out of the question at this time, for it would rally but few recruits.⁵⁸

Following the election of 1848—which settled nothing—events soon brought on a crisis. With the discovery of gold in California, settlers rushed to the west in such numbers that the territorial question obviously could be delayed no longer. The abolitionists were registering the vow again and again that not another slave state should enter the union; they were making persistent demands for action against slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia; interference with the rendition of fugitive slaves was becoming more frequent.

In view of this situation the south became aroused, as never

⁵⁸ Letters by Elmore, Rhett, Brydsall, Fisher, Lumpkin, Peronneau, Johnson, Prescott, Calhoun, Paulding, Harlee, Wigfall, Yancey, Ellis, Seabrook, Wilson, Webb, DeBow, 1847 and 1848, Calhoun papers; letters by Toombs, Cobb, Thomas W. Thomas, James C. Dobbin, Henry R. Jackson, Thomas Smith, W. C. Daniell, John Forsyth, James F. Cooper, 1848, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*.

before. Some defensive action seemed to be imperative, but no agreement could be reached. During the course of the year 1849 literally scores of suggestions for a policy and more or less definite action were made in as many different quarters. The writer actually has catalogued more than forty plans offered for the people of a county, congressional district, or state, individually, and for the south as a whole.⁵⁹

Through this maze of suggestions it is clear that though a majority realized that the south was in a desperate position, there was no agreement as to the best method of procedure; and, further, even when a more or less definite proposal for action was made, there is little evidence that the proposition had been carefully thought out to a logical conclusion; more often than not the suggestion came from a befogged mind.

Early in 1849 one of the suggested measures was attempted. On January 15 the southern members of congress met in caucus to consider an address prepared by Calhoun. The reports of the debates in the caucus seem to show that the hopes of those who expected southern politicians, whigs and democrats, to unite in defense of southern rights, were groundless; instead, the southerners persistently divided on the old party lines, and even the democrats could not agree among themselves. The whigs displayed their conservatism and loyalty to the union. Their opposition was not sufficient to prevent the publication of the address, but they did succeed in relegating it to the status of a party affair and thereby robbed it of much of the effect anticipated for it by its promoters. Toombs wrote to Crittenden that he had told Calhoun very bluntly "that the union of the south was neither possible nor desirable until we are ready to dissolve the Union . . . and that we intended to stand by the government until it committed an overt act of aggression upon our rights, which neither we nor the country ever expected."⁶⁰ The southern whigs, in the main, simply would have none of "Mr. Calhoun's desperate remedies," and in several state legislatures successfully exerted a moderating influence as reflected in state resolutions. They still placed

⁵⁹ To give the exact source citation for each one of these suggestions would take too much space. They are found in newspaper files and correspondence collections covering the year 1849.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 140.

hope in Taylor's administration to protect their rights, and would not believe that consideration of the disunion alternative would really ever become necessary.

The southern address reviewed the development of the abolitionist crusade, the offenses of the north, such as breaking the provisions of the constitution for the rendition of fugitive slaves, and the aggressions already launched in congress, and concluded that, unless vigorously resisted, the abolitionists would accomplish their design in the near future. Following emancipation, the blacks would be raised to political power by the north, and southern whites would sink into oblivion and degradation. Only unity of action would prevent such a calamity. However, in spite of the most earnest endeavors by those who pleaded that a united south could preserve southern constitutional rights and thus the union, the southern address, bearing the names of only forty-eight signers — a few more than half the southerners in congress — succeeded only in precipitating a three-cornered political fight in the south in the fall elections of 1849 among the whigs, the Calhoun-“chivalry”-southern-rights-democrats, and the regular or anti-Calhoun democrats. The regular democrats still believed that the northern democrats and the national party were true to the south and worthy of confidence and support. Neither democratic group had any confidence in the southern whigs, who, they believed, would support Taylor even if he signed a Wilmot proviso law. The resistance democrats had no confidence in the regular democrats, who, they believed, would cling to the party and the union until southern rights were beyond redemption. The regular democrats argued that all southerners, including the whigs, should support the northern democrats in their fight for southern rights, or these northern democrats, failing to receive the southern support they deserved, would have to abandon the southern cause and appeal for abolitionist votes as the whigs were doing. Indeed, the southern address, it seemed, had been worse than useless: it had divided the south and thus had encouraged the antislavery forces in the north.⁶¹

⁶¹ Letters by Lumpkin, Wigfall, Byrdsall, Weems, Sims, Wickliffe, Starke, 1849, Calhoun papers; letters by Cobb, Hopkins Holsey, John H. Lumpkin, George S. Houston, John W. Burke, James B. Bowlin, James Buchanan, Lewis Cass, Thomas D. Harris, Henry L. Benning, 1849, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*.

While the status of California remained unsettled, in 1849, southern whig leaders, hoping to save embarrassment for the Taylor administration, rallied about a plan to try to get the new territory admitted as a single state before the inauguration. This would remove the troublesome subject, would add but a single state to the strength of the north, and would evade the issue of the Wilmot proviso without sacrificing the honor of the south.⁶²

The resistance or radical wing of the southern democrats had no patience with the temporizing of the southern whigs, saw only the prospect of further aggressions in the immediate future, and began to talk of resistance and disunion. The movement took definite form in Mississippi and resulted in the call of a southern convention to meet at Nashville on June 3, 1850. The whigs tried at first to block the movement, and then, when this could not be accomplished, to force the radicals to moderate their position. Of course by this time a number of whigs had become infected with the contagion of ultrasectionalism and had become radicals, while conservative democrats tended to draw away from the radical leaders of their party.

Taylor's message in December, 1849, disclosed his plan in regard to the territories. California should be admitted as a state at once with its free constitution, framed while congress had delayed giving it even territorial organization; and New Mexico was soon to follow the same course; thus the problem would be solved without the intervention of congress. Of course southern democrats at once denounced the heresy of "approving the Wilmot proviso in the constitution of California," and Calhoun dubbed it the "Executive proviso." Southern whigs, except a few insurgents, approved the president's plan.

Meanwhile the time approached for selecting delegates to the Nashville convention. The policy of the southern whigs, in state after state, was either to block the sending of delegates at all, or, if delegates were to be sent, to try to select moderate men. They were partially successful in both directions. Before the convention met, however, the Clay compromise measures had been introduced into congress and were being debated. In spite of the efforts of whig congressmen, Taylor refused to sponsor the compromise plan, and prepared to come out even

⁶² Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 143.

more strongly for immediate admission of California and New Mexico, determined to back the latter's boundary claims against Texas with troops if necessary. Before he could succeed in bringing the issue between his plan and that of congress, he died after a brief illness. Taylor's death smoothed the way for the passage of the compromise.

The Nashville convention meantime proved virtually a fiasco for two reasons: final action had to be delayed until after the adjournment of congress, and in view of the strong pronouncements against disunion or radical action which had been registered in many southern states, the presentation of 36° 30' as an ultimatum and the pronouncing of disunion tenets seemed worse than fruitless. When the time came for the second session, there had been a union victory in Georgia and the whigs again were unrepresented. Fire-eating speeches and discussion of radical resolutions condemnatory of the entire compromise adjustment became the order of the day—with but very little perceptible effect in either section. The convention denounced all president-making conventions and recommended a southern congress to secure concerted action of the whole south.

Distrust of the Nashville convention was felt from the time of the launching of the movement not alone among southern whigs; some conservative democrats also distrusted it because they feared that either the radicals would deliberately make demands which the nonslaveholding states could not sanction and secession would be forced, or the convention would be far from unanimous as to the proper course to be pursued and a divided front would weaken the south. The ultimatum of the Nashville convention—the extension of the Missouri compromise line to the Pacific—was indeed regarded by the whigs and the conservative democrats as an effort on the part of the radical democrats to force secession, because they wanted no compromise accepted. During the debate in congress on the compromise measures in the summer and fall of 1850, the whigs and the conservative democrats argued for acceptance, if the measures should be passed by congress, and endeavored to show that the measures really would put the south in as good a position as the extension of the Missouri compromise line to the coast.⁶³

⁶³ Cobb from Hiram Warner, March 17, 1850, from John B. Lamar, July 3, 1850, from William H. Morton, July 10, 1850, from John H. Lumpkin, July 21,

Of course the abolitionists claimed at the time, and many historians since have maintained, that the compromise measures of 1850 constituted a one-sided bargain, a victory for the aggressive slavocracy. But it is only fair to state that many southerners also regarded it as a one-sided arrangement, in which the south gained nothing. Another free state was added — California. In the provision for the organization of Utah and New Mexico without the Wilmot proviso, the south gained nothing save a point of principle which should never have been raised — an unreasonably aggressive abolitionist move was temporarily blocked. The Texas boundary settlement, although perhaps equitable as far as Texas was concerned, was considered as a loss to the south as a whole; a large district which was slave territory under Texas was now put in a status where it might be lost by the slave interests. The abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia was a clear concession to the abolitionists. The new fugitive-slave law was regarded simply as a long-delayed recognition of southern rights under the constitution.

Putting it still more forcefully, some southerners said that to admit California as a state with its free constitution, without giving the south a chance to share in the common heritage of California soil, during a territorial stage, was to enforce the Wilmot proviso in an insulting form. Furthermore, the policy of the administration officials in regard to nonintervention was pronounced a fraudulent pretense; for, it was said, they had dispatched agents who engineered the whole process of forming the state government and giving it a free-state hue. A more flagrant violation of the constitution and the principles of the federative compact had never disgraced the senate. What guarantee was there that the south would not also, in due season, be robbed of the rest of the new territory, by some trick or theory conjured up for the purpose? The proposition to purchase nearly one-third of Texas, with the south's own money, to become ultimately subject to some newfangled nonintervention or proviso of free-soilism, was another outrage. The abolition

29, 1850, Cobb to William Hope Hull, July 17, a public letter (published August 20, and 21, 1850), in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 186, 191, 194, 206, 208, 196; Boucher, "The secession and co-operation movements in South Carolina," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 5:84-107.

of the slave trade in the District of Columbia was not contested unanimously as a provision undesirable in itself, but as an entering wedge put there by the abolitionists to prepare for total abolition in the district in the near future.

Such were the views of many southerners, summarized by one writer as follows: "A more wretched abortion, a more miserable apology for a compromise, a more wanton insult to the understanding and the firmness of the southern people, never before was offered by professing friends or open enemies." Another said its title should have been "The ignominious surrender of the South."

Such views did not prevail, however. The voices of the conservatives were soon raised to show that the compromise settlement was fair, just, and honorable, or at least as good as could have been expected under the circumstances, and that certainly, if carried out faithfully, it left the south no grievance serious enough to cause talk about secession.⁶⁴

To say, as a recent writer has said, that southern leaders projected a scheme to enlarge the boundaries of Texas so as to extend slavery over a large part of New Mexico, and to accept the statement of the abolitionists at the time that the payment of ten millions of dollars to Texas for the alleged surrender of claims to a part of New Mexico was a bribe to secure votes necessary to pass the other measures, and that even the boundaries conceded to Texas involved the surrender of free territory, not only misrepresents the situation, but presents what has been proved untrue. Furthermore, if the compromise was such a victory for the south, why was it necessary to buy southern votes for it?⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See many letters of 1850 and 1851, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*; Boucher, "The secession and co-operation movements in South Carolina," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 5:67-138.

⁶⁵ William C. Binkley, "The question of Texan jurisdiction in New Mexico under the United States, 1848-1850," in *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 24:1-38. Much light on the truth about Texan boundary lines and claims is found in Binkley, "The expansionist movement in Texas, 1836-1850," an unpublished thesis submitted for the Ph.D. degree at the University of California. The administration at Washington sustained the general claim of Texas to the Rio Grande boundary in 1845-1846; and in February, 1847, the United States secretary of state, in response to a protest from Governor J. P. Henderson, said that the military government set up by General Kearney over Santa Fé was only temporary and acknowledged the claims of Texas to that region. (Manuscript in file box 184,

To the south, the passage of the compromise of 1850 by congress served not as a pacifier, but as an apple of discord for at least a twelvemonth thereafter. Throughout most of the section forces rallied on one side for submission or union, and on the other for resistance or disunion; and in Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina there came a contest as bitterly waged as any the south had ever seen. The compromise measures were thoroughly dissected, with the result that one group pronounced the settlement, as a whole, fair, while the other group found little to praise in any single item and pronounced it as a whole most unfair and worthy only of decisive rejection.

From the time of the passage of the measure until the election of 1852, about as many and almost the same variety of suggestions were offered for state or sectional policy as had been brought forward in the period just before the passage of the compromise. Most of these hinged upon the policy of rejection of the compromise terms, or acceptance of them with the necessary accompaniment of proper guarantees for their preservation. It became a period of confusion in the south, with readjustment of party lines and personnel in regard to national policy. A few whigs still clung to the idea of a continuance of their allegiance to the national party, but the majority, believing that the northern wing of the party had become almost if not entirely an abolitionist party, looked toward the formation of a new national union party, which should eliminate the abolitionists and stand for the guaranty of southern rights on the basis of the compromise settlement. Some democrats were willing to join such a party; others still regarded the national democratic party as such a party and hence wished to maintain affiliation with it; while the ultra wing of the democratic party, joined perhaps by a few whigs, could see hope only in resistance — disunion.

After a most bitter contest waged during elections, in legislatures, and in state conventions, the conservatives won the day and an aggressive policy — secession — was defeated. A for-
department of state, Austin, Texas. The writer is indebted to Professor C. W. Ramsdell for calling his attention to this document.) Of course this does not validate historically the claims of Texas asserted consistently from 1836, but it does validate the Texas claim as contested between Texas, New Mexico, and the United States after the Mexican war.

midable majority seemed to agree that secession at the time was not the proper step, and in the debates it became clear that a very considerable number refused to accept the metaphysics of the secession doctrine and held that a state or section possessed only the inherent right of revolution, and when such a policy was adopted all its consequences must be considered. Without reading some of the newspapers and correspondence of the time it is impossible to gain a full impression of the bitterness of the contest in the south. It is by no means preposterous to wonder whether the ultra leaders were not hated and distrusted by many of their more conservative southern brethren quite as much as were the abolitionists. Indeed, in many an instance, the abolitionists and the southern radicals were put in the same category as undesirable and dangerous citizens.⁶⁶

"Confusion" is the only word which will describe the political situation in the south from 1848 to 1860, and especially in 1851 and 1852. Indeed it was confusion confounded in the two years following the passage of the compromise of 1850, for the character of the confusion in South Carolina was different from that in Georgia, while that in Mississippi was different from that in either Georgia or South Carolina.

In South Carolina after a year of intense excitement and campaigning, with a great variety of complications introduced to becloud the situation and confuse the voter, things gradually settled down to an issue of immediate secession by that state alone versus coöperation with some one or more of the other southern states. When the question was finally settled at the polls in October, 1851, the coöperationists polled sixty per cent of the votes cast. This meant nothing except acceptance of the compromise settlement.

In Georgia it was evident fairly early that the secessionists were in a minority, and the struggle growing out of the necessary readjustment of party lines came to be one to determine control of the political policy of the state for ensuing years. The internecine party warfare continued most bitterly in Geor-

⁶⁶ Calhoun papers; *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*; *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*; Boucher, "The secession and co-operation movements in South Carolina," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 5:67-138.

gia, with considerable shifting of personnel, for more than three years.⁶⁷

In the south as a whole, during this period of party readjustment, the union democrats and the southern rights democrats prepared to restore harmony and coöperation. The tendency of the union whigs and of a smaller group of state-rights whigs was to give up the idea of longer affiliation with the national whig party and to join the democratic party; the campaign of 1852, especially with the nomination of Scott, fostered this tendency. The northern wing of the whig party was regarded in the south as lost to abolition, while there was still some hope in the democratic party. Party ties, however, were strong, and many were very reluctant to see them severed; indeed, toward the middle of the campaign a strong effort was made, with some promises of success, to start a tremendous reaction in favor of Scott. Every effort was made to prove him sound on the compromise of 1850. When the returns came in, however, the extent of the southern whig disaffection was shown—Scott carried only two states, Kentucky and Tennessee. It was a vote of lack of confidence, on the part of the southern whigs, in Scott and the northern wing of the party. Several sporadic efforts were made to rehabilitate the whig party in the south after 1852, but the result was only confusion. All that was clear was that though the whig party in the south was dead, the section was not united under the single democratic banner with a single policy or program in case action were needed. “The Whig party in the south had degenerated into a mere opposition party, ready to act under one name or another in the cause ‘against the democrats.’ ”⁶⁸

The south as a whole, at the time of the election of 1852, may be said to have reached something of an agreement on policy. The Georgia platform seemed to have become the southern platform: the compromise of 1850 was to be accepted as a

⁶⁷ Letters by Toombs, Stephens, Cobb, Thomas D. Harris, John H. Lumpkin, James Jackson, John B. Lamar, Orion Stroud, Henry L. Benning, George D. Phillips, Francis J. Grund, William H. Hull, Thomas C. Howard, John C. Johnson, James A. Meriwether, Henry S. Foote, Andrew J. Donelson, George W. Jones, John Slidell, Hopkins Holsey, John E. Ward, John Milledge, 1851-1852, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*.

⁶⁸ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 281; Toombs to John J. Crittenden, December 15, 1852, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 322.

final settlement, but if it were violated by the north, or if further aggressions came from that section, the south was determined to resist. But this was more the appearance of unity than a reality, for there was sure to come disagreement over such points as these: what was a violation of the compromise? what was a further aggression worthy of resistance? and, if resistance were demanded, what form of action should be taken? These questions were certain to revive the old differences and prevent unity of action.

The Kansas-Nebraska bill was the next development to disturb the apparent equilibrium between the sections and to introduce further confusion among southerners. We do not as yet know all the forces back of the introduction of this measure, but it seems to have been a political job, in which many northern politicians and groups were interested, with various and sundry motives and interests to serve. To represent it as the product of a united and aggressive slavocracy is to obscure the truth. Among the various factors produced by conditions in the nation at large and in several localities in particular—factors compounded in just what proportion we do not as yet definitely know—which led to the bill to organize the Nebraska territory and to repeal the Missouri compromise, may be enumerated the following: the agitation for one or more transcontinental railways; the local demand in Missouri and Iowa for the organization of the territory; the demands of the prospective settlers and speculators; the activities of the Wyandot Indians; the necessity for adequate protection for emigrants, travelers, traders, and mail-carriers in and through the territory; the dissensions in the democratic party in Missouri and in New York; the Benton-Atchison feud in Missouri; Douglas' political position and aspirations; the question of slavery in the territories; and the appearance and growth, in some quarters, both north and south, of the idea that the principle of the compromise of 1850 had superseded that of the compromise of 1820.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ P. Orman Ray, *The repeal of the Missouri compromise; its origin and authorship* (Cleveland, 1909); Frank H. Hodder, "Genesis of the Kansas-Nebraska act," in Wisconsin historical society, *Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 69-86; Ray, "The genesis of the Kansas-Nebraska act," in American historical association, *Annual report*, 1914 (Washington, 1916), 1: 259-280.

Though the logic of Calhoun's pronouncements upon slavery in the territories seems now to have demanded the repeal of the Missouri compromise, it is highly doubtful whether more than a very few southern leaders, if any, other than a few in Missouri, had ever seriously considered striving for such action. Southerners had more or less generally accepted the Calhoun theory for future policy, at the time of its pronouncement, but had little thought, if any, of making it retroactive. Though a few of the leaders of what was called the Calhoun wing of the democratic party in Missouri, as opposed to the free-soil wing led by Benton, may have cherished the hope in 1853 that the Missouri compromise might be repealed—and one of them, Judge William C. Price, later boasted that he had originated and sponsored the idea as early as 1844—there seems to be only such evidence as may be drawn from inference that southern leaders like Calhoun, Davis, Breckinridge, Toombs, Benjamin, and others of "the leaders of the aggressive slavery extension party," with whom Price and the Calhoun democrats of Missouri are said to have been in close touch, were responsible for prompting and pressing for the repeal. In other words, the evidence is lacking to show that the repeal feature was the product of a proslavery extension plot among southern leaders at large. Even in so far as it was the product of the local political feud in Missouri—and this is its most intimate connection with the southern cause—it seems to have been precipitated by the aggressiveness of Benton against Atchison, and Atchison sponsored the repeal in the latter part of 1853 when forced to it, to save his very political life, in spite of the fact that he had said in the preceding March that there was no remedy for the law of 1820, since it could not be repealed.⁷⁰

With all the pressing interests enumerated above, the territorial organization of Nebraska, whether with or without the repeal of the Missouri compromise, could not have been longer delayed, it seems. In the face of circumstances, Douglas perhaps became convinced that he could best serve the interests of northern Illinois, his party, and himself by accepting the repeal amendment, when it was urged by Atchison and actually presented by Dixon of Kentucky; and other interested

⁷⁰ Ray, "The genesis of the Kansas-Nebraska act," in American historical association, *Annual report*, 1914, volume 1, pp. 259-280.

parties who were desirous only of the immediate organization of the territory were willing to accept the repeal because they believed that territorial organization might be delayed without it and that their immediate interests would not be adversely affected by it.

Once the bill embodying the repeal of the Missouri compromise was before congress, a majority of the southern whigs in congress joined the southern democrats in support of it. The position of many was aptly put by Senator Clayton of Delaware when he said: "I did not ask for it, I would not have proposed it; and I may regret that it was offered, because I do not believe that it will repay us for the agitation and irritation it has cost. But can a Senator, whose constituents hold slaves, be expected to resist and refuse what the North thus freely offers us as a measure due to us?"⁷¹ The first impulse of southerners in general seemed to be to welcome the bill because its great underlying principles were nonintervention and popular sovereignty, making it the logical development of the compromise of 1850. They were inclined to view it simply as a long-delayed act of justice to the south, and felt that it would certainly be unbecoming of a southern congressman to refuse it when offered. Even though it might not result in the actual extension of slavery, the point at issue was one of principle, and a wholesome moral victory might be gained.

The passage of the bill is generally represented as a victory for the slaveholding interests. But there were other interpretations of it in the south. Though all rejoiced because of the point of principle involved in this partial removal of the stigma of federal legislation directed avowedly against southern institutions, many cautioned against building false hopes upon it, for the following reasons: the act would not put an end to antislavery agitation or congressional interference, for the operation of the act would inevitably bring the question back to the floors of congress; the south would really gain nothing because of its unequal capacity for immediate expansion, as compared with that of the north; and, furthermore, slavery would not be profitable in this territory. Many objected to the bill because they believed that it established the principle of

⁷¹ Quoted in Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 293.

squatter sovereignty in such a way as to preclude congressional protection against hostile territorial legislation. Many saw the ambiguities of the bill, and realized that it was likely to bring the issue between squatter sovereignty and popular sovereignty — meaning by the former the right of a people during the territorial stage to exclude slavery, and meaning by the latter the right to exercise such power only after reaching the condition of statehood, though not often was such a nice distinction drawn in defining these two terms even if the difference in principle was recognized. This ambiguity was glossed over, in some quarters, by talk of establishment of congressional nonintervention, or by a profession of belief that the bill said to slaveholders that they could go into the territory with their property and be safe until as a sovereign state the people decided for or against the institution. Others pointed out that northern democrats were defending the act, not as a measure of justice to the south, but as an antislavery measure — that instead of opening up northern territory to southern colonization, it really opened up southern territory to northern conquest.

There were southerners, it must be added, who spoke their minds in and out of congress against the repeal of the Missouri compromise as an unjustifiable breach of plighted faith which could serve no practical end for the south and would ultimately cause only discomfort and loss. The whigs especially were indifferent to the fate of the bill and could not share enthusiasm for an abstract principle which promised no practical advantages for the south. Apprehensions of a renewed agitation of the slavery question were frequently registered.

The Kansas-Nebraska bill was a surprise quite as much to the south as to the north; but, once it was introduced, it was natural that the south should easily convince itself that the measure was simply a measure of delayed justice involving no breach of faith in the repeal of the Missouri compromise. The south had accepted the compromise of 1820 in good faith, and had never thought of repudiating it. When new territory was acquired to the west of the Louisiana territory, the south had said again and again that it was willing to accept the principle of the Missouri compromise and extend the line to the Pacific. But the north would have none of it, had put the Wilmot proviso, instead of the Missouri principle, into the bill to organize

Oregon, and had further repudiated the principle in the long struggle over California and New Mexico. Thus the north had abandoned the principle underlying the settlement of 1820 and stood for a new one—absolute exclusion of the south from all territories. A new compromise agreement was reached in 1850, which in principle rejected both that of the compromise of 1820 and the new principle sponsored by the north. Thus, after the north had abandoned the principle of 1820 and had accepted the new one of 1850, with what grace could it now object to the application of the new principle to the present and all future cases? The Kansas-Nebraska bill would settle the question in conformity with the declared will of the whole people, bring “peace, equality and fraternity.” This was the line of reasoning pursued by many northern democrats as well as southerners.⁷²

It is not easy to discover the warrant for the statement made in a recent book that for ten years the leaders of the Calhoun section of the democratic party had been laboring to get rid of the Missouri compromise. Though many southerners after 1846 repudiated the basic principle underlying the passage of the Missouri compromise—that congress had power over slavery in the territories—very few, if any, of these seriously contemplated asking for a repeal of the Missouri compromise as applied definitely to the Louisiana purchase territory. Indeed they would not have been led to deny the power of congress over slavery in the territories if the Wilmot proviso had not been introduced; and, when they did deny the power, they did it with future settlements in the new territory in mind.

It is evident that during the development of the situation in Kansas which Sumner called the “crime against Kansas” and to which many historians refer as “bleeding Kansas,” the south had little accurate information as to what was actually going on, either in Kansas or in administrative circles in Washington. All sorts of conflicting reports and rumors were current in the south concerning what was happening in Kansas, how much the agents of the administration were responsible for inter-

⁷² Boucher, “South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession, 1852 to 1860,” in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 6:79-144; Toombs to W. W. Burrell, February 3, 1854, Stephen A. Douglas to Cobb, April 2, 1854, Stephens to J. W. Duncan, May 26, 1854, Cobb to ———, April 21, 1856, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 342, 343, 345, 363.

fering with the working out of the principle of popular sovereignty, and what was really the policy of the president, first Pierce, and then Buchanan. Even when a few southerners agreed on what they believed to be facts, they disagreed as to the significance of the facts and as to what the attitude and policy of the south should be.

The one fact of which they were earliest certain was that the abolitionists had refused to accept the principle in good faith and to let the status of Kansas be settled through natural emigration and settlement. Many southerners from the very first feared and expected treachery, and believed that every available trick would be resorted to by their opponents to make Kansas a free state. As reports both true and false came to the south concerning the evidence of trickery and bad faith, many men were inclined to regard the outcome and the manner of its accomplishment as the final test whether the south could ever hope for justice in the union. Many became interested in the developments in Kansas and the whole territorial question, not merely for the sake of obtaining enough slave states and votes in congress to control the government, but as a question of principle. They believed that a greater question of principle was involved, the loss of which would mean that the abolitionists would then have a clear road on which to march to the abolition of slavery in the states. The rights of the southern states as equals in the union must be protected at some point at once, or they were completely lost. This was the stand at the bridge which must be taken to stop the onrush and complete victory of the abolitionists.

During the period of uncertainty as to what was happening or going to happen in Kansas, many southerners, fearing trickery from the start and receiving reports confirming their fears, could only fall back upon the view that the proof of the pudding would be found in the eating. If the south were not given a fair chance in colonizing Kansas, if artificial emigration were stimulated in the north, if the president, whether Pierce or Buchanan, should instruct or permit his agents in Kansas to discriminate in any way against southern interests, if the south, after seeing California hurried into the union "against all law and all precedent because she was a free state," should see

"Kansas subjected to the rigors of the inquisition because she had a chance of being a slave state," if Kansas were refused admission either directly or through some ingenious circumlocution, simply because it was to be a slave state—then it was likely that the southern people would forsake the leadership of the conservatives and those who had urged acceptance of the bill, and that the radicals—the secessionists—would come into power.

Though historians generally agree to-day that the proslavery men in Kansas resorted to more unfair methods than did their opponents, there were several points on which a fair-minded southerner, not knowing *all* the facts, could base an interpretation similar to one or another of those just given. However, when confronted with the same report as to what had taken place, southerners disagreed radically in forming a judgment. While some men saw only evidences of betrayal and unjustifiable action on the part of President Buchanan and Governor Walker, others saw nothing to criticize. While some insisted that Kansas must become a slave state by whatever means were necessary, fair or foul, and resorted to most specious reasoning to prove a point, others were convinced that a large majority of the people in Kansas were against slavery, that the opposition to the submission of the question, in the constitution, to a free vote and fair count was simply the result of a fear that a majority would condemn slavery, and that "an effort to get a free state into the Union over *the will* of a majority of its citizens would never be submitted to *at the south*." ⁷³

Of course at the time of the Kansas-Nebraska bill the south would have welcomed the addition of another slave state, for defensive purposes in the national councils. The "border ruffians" of Missouri, however, and the slaveholders of the state generally, were interested in an immediate problem of defense which concerned them alone, primarily. The Missouri slaveholders were already surrounded by free territory on the north and east, and saw that if a free state were added on the west,

⁷³ Boucher, "South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 6:79-144; letters by Toombs, Stephens, Cobb, Thomas W. Thomas, William H. Hull, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, Joseph E. Brown, and many others, 1856-1858, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*.

and the underground railroad operated on three sides of this slaveholding peninsula "jutting up into a sea of free-soil," slave property in Missouri would be almost worthless. Slaveholding Missourians frequently asserted at the time of their interest in the Kansas struggle that theirs was a defensive movement to conserve existing slave property and an existing slave society. Their first thought was to defend what they already possessed. To them the settlers of the Emigrant aid society appeared to be "bands of Hessian Mercenaries," an "army of hirelings," "military colonies of reckless and desperate fanatics"—to use their own appellations.

On July 29, 1854, the citizens of Platte county, Missouri, held a meeting at Weston, at which they resolved that all settlers sent to Kansas by free state aid societies must be turned back; and they formed the Platte county self-defensive association, with the object of settling Kansas with proslavery men. So it was in the rest of Missouri: organized effort to win Kansas for slavery came only after the action of the Emigrant aid society was known. From the testimony of Missourians before the congressional investigating committee it seems that the invasion of Kansas for the purpose of voting had not been thought of until the leaders were convinced that the eastern emigrant aid societies had determined to colonize Kansas with antislavery men to make it a free state. In the south popular sentiment justified the action of the Missourians as being an act of self-defense against the unfair encroachments of the north.⁷⁴

When in the autumn of 1855 the word came from Missouri to the rest of the south that unless recruits were sent at once to counterbalance the emigrants sent in by the northern societies all would be lost, some sporadic efforts were made in several southern states to enlist volunteer companies to go to Kansas; fire must be fought with fire. The most famous expedition was that led by Major Buford of Alabama—some three hundred men recruited from several states. Though northern ministers were raising funds to buy Sharpe's rifles for northern emigrants, Buford's men, out of respect for a proclamation by the president, were armed with bibles instead of rifles. In some

⁷⁴ Mary J. Klem, "Missouri in the Kansas struggle," in Mississippi valley historical association, *Proceedings*, 9:393-413.

localities, where a company of ten or twelve volunteers was raised, composed largely of mechanics, artisans, and a few younger sons or nephews of planters, the men were given dinners, balls, and other appropriate demonstrations and were treated as military volunteers; and no doubt many of the men must have gone in the spirit of military volunteers. The cause for which they were no doubt prepared to fight, if occasion demanded it, was not simply that of the rights of slaveholders in the territories, nor two more votes in the United States senate, but it was aptly stated on the banner which the Buford battalion carried when it left Montgomery: on one side was inscribed "The Supremacy of the White Race," and on the other "Kansas — The Outpost." This, in the minds of many southerners, was the real issue; Kansas was really the outpost of the struggle for the supremacy of the white race, because if one point of principle after another were lost, the abolitionists would accomplish their design to emancipate the slaves throughout the union; and, with no real solution as yet suggested for the negro problem which would follow emancipation, southerners believed that the supremacy of the white race, with all its civilization, was truly at stake.

During the struggle over Kansas the members of the strong southern opposition were at one with the southern democrats in desiring to see Kansas won as a slave state, since the Kansas-Nebraska bill had been passed, but the opposition condemned the use of violence to that end, opposed the adoption of the Lecompton constitution, and used the developments in Kansas to justify their saying "I told you so." It was the result many had predicted would follow the repeal of the Missouri compromise and the establishment of squatter sovereignty.⁷⁵

Again it seems a pity that the abolitionists were so aggressive. Kansas was destined to be a free state even in spite of the repeal of the Missouri compromise. It seemed now to be demonstrated that organized efforts to stimulate a great rush of people to Kansas, to become permanent settlers, almost completely failed both in the north and in the south. These efforts have long been overemphasized. They simply stirred up a greater amount of antagonism and strife than would otherwise have been produced. The intensity of the fight for Kansas

⁷⁵ Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 331.

drew strong spirits to the territory, among them many who were attracted by the opportunities to participate in exciting adventures and dangerous exploits. On the other hand, the turmoil kept out of the territory numerous settlers who wanted homes instead of trouble. In the end the natural forces of the westward movement, normal migration and settlement, and not the artificial forces produced by the slavery controversy, determined the character of the majority of the settlers; and these forces, balanced as they were at the time, determined that Kansas was to be a free state.⁷⁶

The Kansas-Nebraska bill put an end to all possibilities of further coöperation between northern and southern whigs. Now was the time of all times for the formation of a southern party per se, and the working out of a grand sectional agreement as to platform policies and program of action. But this could not be. There were some democrats and some whigs who favored such a course, but the radicalism of many of the former repelled those democrats who still had faith in the national democratic party, and also repelled those whigs who were still strong union men as well as those whigs who could not be reconciled to coöperation with democrats under any circumstances. The result was that the know-nothing or American party was in large part the beneficiary and attracted to its ranks a great variety of elements who had few common interests and could not be brought to accept any very definite program. Many there were who joined the ranks of the know-nothings because they believed that here lay the best possibilities of serving sectional interests. The best arguments which they could present to this end were simply that the policy of the party would help to stifle the accretion of strength gained by the abolitionists from the foreign-born, and that the party was really a national one which would aid in putting down the slavery agitation by ignoring it. The growth of the party in the south, however, was simply proof that confusion was to continue in that section and perhaps become more confounded.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ William O. Lynch, "Popular sovereignty and the colonization of Kansas from 1854 to 1860," in Mississippi valley historical association, *Proceedings*, 9:380-392.

⁷⁷ Boucher, "South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 6:79-144; Cole, *The whig party in the south*.

Even though every southern state save Maryland cast its electoral votes for Buchanan in 1856, the half million votes in the south for Fillmore showed that the opposition to the democratic party was not eliminated. Following the inauguration of Buchanan the logic of the situation again called for unity in the south—"an undivided South as the base of a great constitutional party, embracing the conservative men of all sections," as Hillard of Alabama put it.⁷⁸ But again unity was not to be attained. The national democratic party ties were still too strong for many, and as many others placed no faith in this party.

By this time there had grown up in the south what may best be called simply the "opposition"—a conglomeration of old-line whigs, know-nothings, dissatisfied democrats, and conservatives in general; their only common aims were opposition to the democrats in both local and national politics, and a cessation of the "eternal wrangling and spouting at abolitionism."

The Dred Scott decision, published two days after Buchanan was inaugurated, was an attempt on the part of a majority of the supreme court to allay the bitter and dangerous sectional controversy by an endeavor to settle the then most troublesome phase of that controversy, the territorial question. But it came ten years too late. Had the decision been rendered in 1847 the course of events in the next decade might have been considerably different—and perhaps fortunately so for all concerned. However, coming as it did in 1857, it involved too many complications. It accepted the doctrine of Calhoun, denying the power of congress to prohibit slavery in the territories; it declared unconstitutional the basic principle on which the republican party was organized, namely, the prevention of the extension of slavery into any more territories; it nullified the doctrine of popular sovereignty as expounded by Douglas and northern and many southern democrats, that slavery could be excluded by the people of a territory during the territorial stage; it accepted the doctrine of a part of the southern democrats who maintained that slavery could be excluded only at the time of statehood; it was an attempt to interpret the declaration of independence and the constitution of the United States in

⁷⁸ Quoted in Cole, *The whig party in the south*, 327.

the light of the existing conditions, claiming for this interpretation that it must be the one intended by the men of the revolutionary period.

Although there were grave misstatements of historical facts in the process by which the chief justice reached his conclusion in regard to the territories, it must be admitted that to the mind of a southerner, in view of the existing circumstances, the decision as to existing and future territorial policy could but seem eminently equitable. Perhaps a majority of northerners believed that the chief justice, in describing the sentiments of the fathers respecting slavery, was doing what Horace Greeley described as "saying a thing and being conscious while saying it that the thing is not true." This suggests a pertinent question regarding what is represented as the prevailing and accepted social philosophy of the south.⁷⁹ Were not many southerners, when they talked and wrote about the morality and justice of slavery and about its being a divinely ordained institution, in a position like that described by Greeley—but a position forced upon them by necessity of circumstances for immediate protection?

Though the charge was made at the time by republicans that the decision was the result of collusion between members of the supreme court and democratic politicians, including Buchanan and especially southerners, and that there had been a most elaborate and comprehensive program sponsored by the slavocracy to control the federal judiciary, nothing of the sort has ever been proved. No doubt it was suggested to the members of the court, after the case of Dred Scott was on their docket, that a general and all-embracing pronouncement from that august body might do much to calm troubled waters. But the decision did not allay the controversy; the court succeeded only in lowering its own standing in the eyes of thousands in the north and indeed intensified the bitterness of the conflict. The south gained nothing, except a moral victory in its own eyes, for statements soon came from many quarters in the north that the main part of the court's opinion as *obiter dictum* was mere verbiage for them and would not be accepted.

In his debates with Douglas, Lincoln said that the Dred Scott

⁷⁹ To be considered more at length by the writer in a subsequent publication.

decision had raised the alarming question whether the next step would not be a decision to legalize slavery in all the states of the union. There seems to be no evidence, however, that any such design was entertained by southerners. They realized full well that such a step would be extremely hazardous, for it would rob them of their last stronghold for defense of slavery within their own states—the argument that slavery in the states was entirely a state affair. In the light of the time, however, perhaps it was almost as natural and reasonable for Lincoln to make this charge as it was for the southerner to charge that virtually all the antislavery men of the north were definitely planning to have governmental action put an end to slavery in the slave states. In the eyes of each contestant the logic of the situation and the policies of the other seemed to lead to the step charged against the other, each taking for granted that the other had a perverted sense of justice and no sense of, or respect for, constitutional law.

The Freeport doctrine, as set forth by Douglas in his debates with Lincoln in 1858—that a territory might by “unfriendly legislation” keep slavery out in spite of the Dred Scott decision—was not original with Douglas. In a speech in the house on December 11, 1856, James L. Orr of South Carolina had said: “There are some democrats who think the territorial legislatures have power to prohibit or introduce slavery. I do not. But, it matters not, either way, for in every slaveholding community we have local legislation and local police regulation appertaining to that institution, without which the institution would not only be valueless, but a curse to the community. The legislature of a territory can vote for or against laws. If the majority of the people are opposed to slavery, all they have to do is simply to decline to pass laws in the territorial legislature to protect it. So the question whether squatter sovereignty does or does not exist by virtue of the Kansas-Nebraska bill is of no importance. It does by virtue of their power to pass police regulations.”

The shrewder thinkers in the south were not surprised by the Freeport doctrine, for by this time they saw the hopelessness of the south’s position, practically, in regard to the territories. Although the constitution and the Dred Scott decision might

prevent the passage of certain laws to the injury of the slaveholder in the territories, they could not compel for his benefit the passage of laws without which slavery simply could not be maintained. Some southerners therefore suggested demanding the enactment of a slave code by congress for the protection of slavery in the territories. Although a congressional slave code for the territories seemed a logical step following the Dred Scott decision, thinking southerners met embarrassments when they considered demanding a code. What more could the abolitionists ask than thus to be given the legal right to legislate for the negro? Without affecting his legal status as a slave, they could contrive a code which would do more mischief than anything they had yet been able to do. They could give him the power to testify; they could require certain forms preliminary to his sale before a magistrate; they could invest him with certain privileges as to time, goods, dress, all perfectly consistent with his condition as a slave, which would utterly subvert the master's authority and give the negro the power of perpetual and, as far as profit was concerned, destructive annoyance. Did the advocates of the code forget that since 1847 most statesmen of the south of any reputation, "from Mr. Calhoun down," had been struggling to establish the doctrine of nonintervention by congress in the territories? Was the south in 1859 to take the position which was held in 1847 by the abolitionists and free-soilers, and from which they had been driven? Suppose a slave code were attainable; would it be worth a pinch of snuff when it had to be executed by the courts and juries of a territory whose refusal to pass a code had rendered congressional action necessary?

Yet if the south did not adopt this theory of congressional legislation, it was thrown back upon Douglas' popular sovereignty. Some men could accept neither theory, and were inclined to sigh for the good old days of the Missouri compromise. Unconstitutional in a strict legal sense, as it was to them, the Missouri compromise principle seemed the only possible solution of the difficulty. Such speculations led to the query whether it was possible to find any constitutional ground upon which the south could stand firmly, whether there were not great equities in the constitution—broad, strong, natural rights—

which southern statesmen could maintain, whether a policy could be found which would be free from that idle and mischievous spirit of legal metaphysics which had so long passed for profound political thought.⁸⁰

Others were not so despondent and denied the necessity of a congressional code because, they said, the general laws were already sufficient to protect southern property in the territories and to make impossible "unfriendly legislation." Still others declared that a just construction of nonintervention meant no more than that congress should neither establish nor abolish slavery in the territories, but did not preclude congressional interference to counteract unfriendly territorial legislation. This interference might not be necessary, but it should be exercised whenever the territorial legislature attempted to discriminate against slave property by an omission to pass laws for its protection, or by hostile legislation. Nonintervention, it was maintained, was to be denounced as a fallacy if it denied the power of congress to protect property. There was a vast difference between the power to create or destroy by law and the power to protect rights legally existing under a fundamental law. In fact, these men declared that it was the solemn duty of congress to see that nothing was done, either by its own acts or by the acts of its agent — the territorial legislature, to which it might grant local legislative powers—that would destroy any right to which any citizen was entitled under the constitution.⁸¹

During 1858 there was again a movement in the south among the opposition elements to form a conservative, national, union party. They belittled the strength of the aggressive antislavery men in the north, and hoped to rally the conservatives in both sections in a conspiracy of silence, content to let slavery rest in *status quo*. The John Brown affair at Harper's Ferry, however, in October of 1859, did much to prove such a movement fruitless and to revive the sectional feeling in a more intensified form.

The whole story of the ante-bellum period is filled with most

⁸⁰ Hammond from J. J. Seibels, July 30, 1859, from W. H. Trescott, August 9, 1859, from J. L. Orr, September 17, 1859, Hammond papers.

⁸¹ Boucher, "South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 6:126-127.

unfortunate developments. Just when the conservatives in the south were devoting their utmost endeavors to guard against rash action and the rule of passion, and to insure calm judgment, the Harper's Ferry insurrection gave another forceful argument to the radical hotspurs. Many southerners who had not been inclined to pay much attention to the fire-eaters were now soon ready to believe that the people of the north would rejoice to see the whole south wrapped in the flames of servile insurrection. One report of the affair brought it straight home: among the maps found in the conspirator's possession were some of southern states marked with circles and crosses, which seemed to show that the lives and property of these communities had been doomed by the plotters. Henceforth a more careful watch must be maintained to detect agents tampering with the slaves.⁸²

Although John Brown went his solitary way in Kansas, and did not have the support or countenance of the majority of the free-state men there, how could the south know or believe this? The same may be said of his operations in Virginia. Probably less than a hundred people knew beforehand anything about the enterprise at Harper's Ferry, and less than a dozen of these rendered aid and encouragement. But the affair, because it came on the eve of the final election before the war, sharpened the issue and had considerable influence. It played into the hands of extremists in both sections. On one side, Brown was soon made a martyr and a hero; on the other, his acts were accepted as a demonstration of northern malignity and hatred, the fitting expression of which was seen in the incitement of slaves to massacre their masters. John Brown became to southerners the personification of northern opposition. We know today that he was an extremist, perhaps, as some have said, unbalanced mentally, certainly not possessed of robust common sense. But by the time of his rise to notoriety, many in the south could no longer distinguish between John Brown and Abraham Lincoln, even though we know that they were as far apart as the poles. Certain it is that a man who is said to have admired Nat Turner, the leader of the servile insurrection in Virginia, as much as he did George Washington, was a most dangerous citizen at

⁸² Boucher, "South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 6: 130.

such a time. Abolitionists of every class had said much about war and about servile insurrection. By the later eighteen-fifties the south realized what was in the mind of John Brown; he believed that so high was the tension on the slavery question throughout the country that revolution, if inaugurated at any point, would sweep the land and liberate the slaves; he believed that he was himself the divinely chosen agent to let loose the forces of freedom. How could the south help but conclude that if war was to be forced, with the preliminary and accompanying horrors of servile insurrection and race war, the south had better try to prevent it by seceding, or at least have war come without these preliminary and accompanying horrors?

It requires but little imagination to picture the reaction in the south when the news came that when Emerson referred to John Brown as "that new saint . . . who . . . will make the gallows glorious like the cross," he was cheered with enthusiasm by an immense audience in Boston; and there were many other testimonials of the temper of the north.

During 1859 and 1860 the coming presidential election presented to the south grave questions of policy: what part should the section take in that election? just what statement of principle and what candidate should it sponsor? in case of certain election results what course should be pursued? Down to the very eve of the election there was no general agreement on an answer to any of these questions. The nearest there was to a general consensus of opinion seemed to be simply that a black republican victory would mean an end of all probability of safety for the south in the union, unless the section could really be aroused to positive united action as never before and could present as an ultimatum a demand for constitutional amendments which would without question guarantee to the southern states safety within their own boundaries.

When the South Carolina legislature in December, 1859, could not agree on a policy for the state in the immediate future, the members, in the face of this embarrassment, agreed on a compromise declaration that the southern states should appoint delegates at once to arrange a plan of united action. In a short time, however, it was seen that the attempt to promote a southern congress was a failure, for it was soon demonstrated by

action in other states that there was no likelihood that more than one or two states could be interested in the congress, so absorbed were they all in the game of president-making. Even in the case of Virginia, where a special messenger was sent to express sympathy with the state in the John Brown affair and to invite it to lead in securing a southern conference, the attempt failed.⁸³

Clearly there was only one political party—the democratic party—with which the south could possibly coöperate, but there was serious disagreement as to whether the south should be represented even in that party's nominating convention. After a spirited contest—especially so in South Carolina—it was agreed in all the states to send representatives. Here, however, agreement ended. As to the platform statement to be demanded on the territorial question there was serious disagreement: some were for dropping the whole question, or for accepting any statement upon it, because it was a mere abstraction; others were willing to accept popular sovereignty, because that principle would give the south the opportunity to carry slavery wherever climate, soil, methods of production, and population would permit; others, including a majority of the southern delegates at the Charleston convention, insisted upon nonintervention so interpreted as to preclude hostile legislation by a territorial legislature and to allow for prospective legislation by congress if necessary. As to a safe candidate, worthy of southern support, there was again serious disagreement. To many, Douglas was entirely satisfactory, because they regarded him as a noble and gallant man, offering to the south all that the section could in reason expect. Others, however, regarded him as a black-hearted villain of the deepest dye, whose theories were based not on sound principles but on insidious and dangerous sophistries.

When disagreement over the platform was brought to a head in the national democratic convention at Charleston, and the delegations of eight southern states seceded, there seemed to be the prospect of united southern action. Once more, however, the agreement was only on the negative policy of withdrawing; what positive policy should follow was not easily determined. The

⁸³ Boucher, "South Carolina and the south on the eve of secession," in *Washington university studies*, Humanistic series, 6:134.

immediate prospect for the south did not seem to be unity of action, for evidence was painfully clear in nearly every state that there was to be a scramble for the spoils of office available either in the Richmond or the Baltimore convention — the convention of the seceders and the adjourned session of what was left of the regular convention. By no means was it clear that the disruption of the Charleston convention would bring about a dissolution of the union.

Many prominent southerners, including nineteen members of congress, thought that a grave mistake had been made by the seceders, and were for going back into the regular convention at Baltimore. Others were for sending delegates to the convention called by the seceders to meet at Richmond, hoping that this convention would be able to force the Baltimore convention to adopt the territorial principle demanded by the seceders, and thus unite the democratic party again, north and south. Still others, a minority in the south, led by the fire-eating and “chivalry” radicals, wanted the Richmond convention to take independent action and the southern democrats to remain separate and independent from any alliances whatsoever with the north, hoping that secession would be the ultimate result of such action, following the election. This group ultimately had their way in regard to splitting the democratic party, and two democratic candidates, representing two distinct parties, were placed in nomination. As August came, and it was seen that the democratic party was irreparably split, the inevitable result of the election became evident — Lincoln, the black republican candidate, would be the next president.

When election time came the conservative vote in the south was surprisingly large. Even though a vote for Bell, the candidate of still another party, the constitutional union party, indicated a willingness to play the rôle of the ostrich, his popular vote was surprisingly near that for Breckinridge. In the fifteen slave states the electoral vote was 9 for Douglas, 72 for Breckinridge, 39 for Bell. But this does not at all reflect the character of the popular vote. Lincoln polled 26,430, Douglas 163,525, Bell 515,973, and Breckinridge 571,051. If we accept the vote for Breckinridge as indicating the strength of those who were united on an aggressive policy, even to the point of secession, they are found to have constituted only about 45 per cent of the

people of the south. In the eleven states which ultimately constituted the confederacy, the popular vote was: Lincoln, 1,929; Douglas, 72,084 — 8.4 per cent; Breckinridge, 436,772 — 51 per cent; Bell, 345,919 — 40 per cent.

Secession was not a clear-cut issue in the election in the south. Indeed, in the remaining weeks of the year following the election, it was not at all clear that there would be a concerted move for secession in a majority of even the states of the lower south. There was abundant evidence of a strong union feeling, which some said was stronger than at any time in a decade, and it was apparently not at all unlikely that resistance would be delayed and offers of concession or compromise be seriously considered. In South Carolina alone there was a clear-cut determination to act — to secede; but whether its action would strengthen and rally support for, or completely unnerve and deplete the ranks of, the resistance elements in the rest of the south, few in South Carolina pretended to know. Nevertheless, the people of that state went wild with excitement; liberty poles were erected, volunteer companies drilled, and the palmetto flag was greeted with cheers for the new republic. Men who, when the legislature was convened at election time, had urged caution, unless indications were clear that the other southern states were ready to go out and only wanted a leader, now said that South Carolina must secede at once. The state convention, on December 20, when it passed the ordinance of secession, merely gave official expression to what had been determined by the people a month before. Thoroughly wearied by the long period of threatening and blustering, with nerves kept a-tingle for years by the continual wrangling with the north and among themselves, the people of this state at last had reached the point where something, anything, to relieve the tension was welcome. Though by no means unanimously convinced that they were pursuing the course which was certain to bring a decided change for the better, from all standpoints, the people rejoiced in definite action. Few pretended to see clearly what the results would be.

As some people had predicted, the action of South Carolina proved all that was needed to give the advantage to the resistance men in six of the other states which soon followed the example set by the palmetto state. In each of these states,

once the decision was made, the union men declared that they would abide by it and act accordingly. For a few weeks, while "the confederate states of America" were being organized at Montgomery, while the constitution was being framed and officers were being selected, there was really for the first time unity of purpose and action. But this period proved all too brief for the sake of the cause which was destined in a few years to become "the lost cause." Within a short time after the new government was launched there came disagreements, both personal and on policy; these ripened into bitter personal and factional feuds, and all too soon the body politic which should have been a perfect unit, in order to have any hope of success, was torn and distracted by bickerings and jealousies and honest disagreements on fundamental issues of policy.⁸⁴

CHAUNCEY S. BOUCHER

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

AUSTIN

⁸⁴ Letters by Toombs, Stephens, Cobb, Joseph E. Brown, and others, 1859-1860, in *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*; Alexander H. Stephens to Robert Collins and others, May 9, 1860, in Stephens, *Constitutional view of the war between the states* (Philadelphia, 1870), 2:677-684.

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